Pseudotropheus saulosi

By Lee Ann Steeves

Of all the Pseudotropheus, this one is, in my opinion, the cutest in both looks and behavior. Although it is perfectly capable of bullying everything else in the tank, this little fish is not nearly as belligerent as other members of its genus. It is a dwarf mbuna, so it stays relatively small, and groups of six or more in a community tank with other species will ensure that nobody gets beaten up.

I first got seven of these fish from Jessica Miller in January of 1998. They grew fast! I had some holey rock (it grows wild in my back yard) in the tank, and I'll be darned if one of those little critters didn't get stuck in one! I was down to six. As the months passed, they grew larger, and I found that I had only one female in the whole bunch! She got a lot of attention, but she survived it and has produced many spawns for me.

The first spawn resulted in thirteen fry, which I sent up to Greg. The second also resulted in thirteen, but I kept these for myself. Of the remaining spawns, the largest was 36! I had stripped her at about ten days of incubation, and because I wasn't very good at stripping yet, I only got about half

the fry out. I _thought_ I had them all, as there were eighteen little wrigglers in the bucket, but she had some tucked way back. I released her into the tank, and after a couple of hours noticed that her mouth was still full. I decided to not harass her too

much in one day, so I waited another week and stripped the rest from her... another eighteen! They spawned frequently, so I had LOTS of babies to sell.

At one point I decided that all these males in the tank was silly, so I got rid of a couple. I now had three males and one female. This was a huge mistake. The battle for dominance between the two top males resulted in the lesser male and the female being battered constantly. I had to remove all but my most dominant male and my female, and yet he still continued to take his aggressions out on his girlfriend. Lesson learned from this: there is safety in numbers. I removed the female and let her stay in another tank while the fry from an early spawn grew to such size as to form another colony.

When my first saved spawn was large enough, I saved back six possible females (the most orange, least striped) and sold the

rest. I then reunited my pair in the tank with their now nearly-grown fry. Immediately they spawned. The tank temperature was a bit lower than the one they'd been in, and the spawns that I got until I put a heater in were very small... six to eight fry at a time. After the heater was reintroduced and the water brought up to about 80F, the spawn size increased to over twenty. When the younger females grew to within 1/2" of their parents, they started spawning too. To date, I have four females that breed regularly, and a constant supply of fry.

I check carrying fish every two weeks. I take the fish in my hand and use a net to hook a tooth from the lower jaw and open the mouth. I either let her release an egg/fry or just look into her mouth if there's enough light to check the development. If the fry have a tail, I strip her. If not, I get her next time. I prefer to take them just as the head and tail pop out, as they don't seem to perish as easily in a tumbler as eggs do, and I get more fry than if they were to carry to term. I'm almost convinced that the females swallow an occasional fry to sustain herself during the incubation.

The fry are reared in a bare-bottom tank with only a sponge filter. I feed them finely

crushed flake (the same that I feed all my fish) and baby brine shrimp when it's handy. I must admit, they grow much faster on brine, but it's not absolutely necessary. I've raised many spawns on crushed flake alone. Water changes help growth too, as do larger tanks. A 55 is the perfect tank size for raising saulosi fry to salable size.

With young fish, it's difficult to tell the sexes apart. They are bright orange when they are babies, and the females in general stay that way. Males turn blue with black stripes, but only if they are the top male(s) in the hierarchy. Subdominant males can take on female coloration (to protect themselves from attack), and females have been known to stripe up and even take on blue coloration under the right circumstances. Venting is the only sure way to tell, but I use a much simpler method. If it carries eggs, it's female. If it doesn't, it isn't (but that doesn't mean it's male) :-)