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Upcoming Events:

- HCCC March meeting on the 14th at Lee Ann and Greg's house.
- TCA Spring Show and Workshop. April 16-18.
- ACA Annual Convention. July 22-25.

BAP is a Great Success

Our Breeder Award Program is only a couple months old and the benefits for the club and it's members can already be seen.

Through the sale of our BAP fish donations, we are generating some capital for the club. BAP fish donations are available in groups of fry to HCCC members at a great price. Fish not purchased by members can then be sold to local fish stores. This not only generates income for our club, but the fish stores and their customers can also benefit from quality HCCC BAP fish. It is a win-win situation for all those involved.



When the BAP fish make it to local stores, we will include with them a BAP report. This report will detail information about the fish, its native origins and the best way to successfully keep it.

This will help hobbyist understand the type of fish they will be purchasing. At the same time educating fish store employees about the fish they are selling.

Several of our members have already earned valuable points and helped make their fish available to others. For information on what HCCC members have already bred, see page 9 or visit www.xdeleon.com/hccc/bap.

Picture of the Month



Submitted by Greg Steeves, this fantastic photograph shows a *Pundamilia nyererei* Python Island and an *Astatotilapia aneo-color* from Lake George facing off.

Some Lake Victoria Basin cichlids are known for their aggressiveness, but under the right conditions, it can be controlled and minimized.

Species Profile: *Neochromis rufocaudalis*

—by Greg Steeves

The lakes of the African rift contain many varied species of aquatic life. Each of these large bodies of water contain their own unique varieties of fish that have come to take advantage of particular feeding niches. Food supply is generally the key factor in determining diversity. Algae supply is abundant in these lakes and many different species of fish have evolved to exploit this food source. Not surprisingly, the true grazers of the rift valley region have similar characteristics. *Labeotropheus* species of Lake Malawi, the *Tropheus* of Lake Tanganyika, and the *Neochromis* of Lake Victoria are three such species that although they have evolved separately from one another, share common traits. Specialized tooth structure, elongated intestinal tracts, and a robust torpedo shaped body structure all aid these fish in processing the food on which they feed.

The fish I want to deal with here is endemic to Lake Victoria. *Neochromis rufocaudalis*, formerly known as *Neochromis nigricans* is not one of the more threatened species of Lake Victoria. I am not certain as to how geographical variants of this species may differ, but the variety of *rufocaudalis* that we keep was exported from the Saa Nane Island region of Lake Victoria.

This is not a large fish, growing only to about five inches maximum. Females and sub dominant males are similarly patterned. A broken series of blotches along the lateral line is backgrounded by an earth brown coloration. Dominant male coloration is strikingly beautiful. Males will sport a dark blue to almost black body coloration with bright red tail

and anal fins. Several jet-black vertical bars are evenly spaced along the body. The dorsal fin is a vibrant metallic blue outlined with a bright red stripe. The horizontal barring between the eyes of this beauty, commonly seen in Lake Malawi species, really sets this fish off nicely.

Dominant males will stake out a territory, usually in a rock cave or crevice. When not chasing other fish, male *Neochromis rufocaudalis* spend their time showing off with a series of "shimmy's" to prospective females. It is a beautiful sight to see a large group of these fish grazing an algae covered rock. Reflections cast on their body glitter and gleam in the light. To keep these undemanding fish in top condition, it is helpful to feed a spirulina base flake in small amounts frequently. This would be a great fish for those hobbyists who feel their animals are always hungry and have the need to sprinkle food to them every time they walk by the tank. *Rufocaudalis* are not shy fish and will learn to recognize their feeder on sight. They will remain mostly in the open under captive settings, but caves and secluded places throughout the tank will aid in overcoming any timidity they may possess. Although these fish have spawned for me, I have as yet to observe the act. I presume that breeding is in the typical great lakes mouthbrooder manner. When keeping a group of any type of Victorian cichlid,



“When not chasing other fish, male *Neochromis rufocaudalis* spend their time showing off with a series of “shimmy's” to prospective females”

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the bigger the tank, the better. I would suggest an aquarium of no less than 55 gallons for a group of twelve *Neochromis rufocaudalis*. It is not advisable to mix any Lake Victoria rock cichlid species together in a tank due to the possibility of interbreeding; however, one may find it necessary from time to time. The *rufocaudalis* might be an exception to this rule. The very rounded, trophus-like head structure of this species make it easily identifiable from most other cichlids from this region. I have previously grouped a *rufocaudalis* colony with an equal number of *Haplochromis* sp. "purple yellow" and there was no damaging inter-species conflicts. Males and females of each species are readily able to identify their own and any prelude to breeding activity is kept between same

species fish. If you must mix species of Victorian cichlids, try to use fish as different as possible. This includes differing body shape and especially coloration. We as hobbyists must endeavor to keep our fish races as pure as possible because, as Brad Harrison in his introduction to Lake Victoria stated, "there is no going back to the well"

Neochromis rufocaudalis are a peaceful fish and mix well with Malawian mbuna. Like most Victorian rock cichlids, they are not a common fish in the hobby and are an undemanding jewel for our tanks. Under a Grolux lighting scheme, dominate males sparkle and stand out very nicely. Shale rock work and artificial plants will aid in making this fish feel comfortable. Enjoy!

"Under a grolux lighting scheme, dominate males sparkle and stand out very nicely."

Species Profile: *Aulonocara stuartgranti*

—by Roberto De Leon

Aulonocara stuartgranti "Ngara Flametail" is a maternal mouthbrooder native to the Mdoka, near Ngara, Lake Malawi. The local climate is in the mid 70's to 80's and the pH of the native waters for this fish is between 7.8 to 8.6. Males achieve a size of about 5" and are blue on the face and dorsal fin. The flank is orange or red starting at the shoulder and going all the way to the tail. Females achieve a size of about 3" and are the classic peacock brown.

I originally obtained eight ½" long fish from local hobbyist. These particular fry were supposedly from a line breed variety that produces a fire engine red color. Once large enough to sex, I kept a single pair. The fish bred in a 75 gallon tank which contained pool filter sand and was not planted. The tank was well filtered

and had a pH of 7.8. I performed weekly water changes equal to 20% of the tank volume. Fish were fed a combination of HBH flake and pellets (krill) with an occasional Cyclop-eeze treat.

Although I did not observe the spawning, the female released 11 fry. While holding, the female stayed on the fringes of the tank most of the time. At about 3 weeks, I moved the female to a breeding net in another tank. Fry were released later that evening and were well developed at about .25", maybe a little larger, with no noticeable egg sack. Once the female released the fry, she did not ex-



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hibit any tendency to care for them.

The next day I moved the fry to a 10gal tank of their own. The tank had a seasoned sponge filter and an AC150 with pre-filter, no substrate. I started the fry off on Cyclop-eeze and crushed flake. I also tried Golden Pearls which they seem to get very excited by, but did not eat well. I believe that the smell was very attractive, but the texture was not to their liking.

The adult male is taking a long time to fully develop his coloration. The blue and yellow came at an early age but the change to red/orange is very slow. The pair spend the day sifting through the sand and swimming around. I was surprised that this pair spawned so soon, especially since the female is so small

(about 2"). I was even more surprised that the female held her first time around. The brood was smaller than what I expect in the future. I had heard that this particular variant was difficult to breed but they seemed to know what they were doing. This variant is especially attractive. Even though it hasn't developed its colors completely, it is still very beautiful.

Since this fish can get to a good size and is sometimes aggressive toward the female, I would recommend nothing smaller than a 4 foot tank with multiple females. Tank mates should be other peacocks or haps, but with nothing too aggressive. Spirulina is well accepted, but a diet also including more "meatier" food is recommended.

“I was surprised that this pair spawned so soon, especially since the female is so small “

Species Profile: *Lamprologus ocellatus*

— by Dave Hansen

I started out initially with 5 juveniles from David Pakela. After watching them for several weeks I started to see some size differences and determined which were males and which were females. In addition the fish behavior was used to aid in telling the differences. The male that I ended up with had claimed about a 6" radius of sand and all shells in that area as his own. The ones I determined to be females tended to stay with one shell. I noticed a couple of the potential females had some minor defects. At this point Robert Deleon had a couple of females available and I bought them from him and culled everything else out. I had 1 male and 2 females left at this point, I hoped!

I had the setup as follows. A 20-gallon tank with some holey rock as a divider

down the middle and about 25 shells. Of course I couldn't leave well enough alone and added some other fish to the mix, *Julidochromis ornatus*, but this did not work out very well and the *Lamprologus ocellatus* never were very comfortable in that situation. I removed the Julies and decided to go with a species only tank. I was doing water changes of about 20% on a weekly basis. I fed Brine shrimp flakes in the morning and either frozen plankton, mysis, or brine in the afternoon. The fish continued to gain size and I figured I was still



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some time away from any spawns. Not long after this on about 5 Feb 04, I noticed one of the females would not leave the entrance to her shell, except to feed. She laid long ways across the shell and looked to be in a defensive position. I thought maybe some eggs had been laid and kept an eye out. On 19 Feb 04, I noticed 2 fry at the mouth of the shell and after periodic observations have seen up to 5 at one time. I am leaving them in the tank and feeding them Cyclop-eeze and baby brine shrimp. When feeding the parents their flake I crush a little bit for the fry. I have turned the filters down to their

minimum flow rate during feedings just to make sure that food is reaching the bottom for the fry.



In addition, I believe the other female has laid some eggs also.

I hope this has been helpful.

“I noticed one of the females would not leave the entrance to her shell... I [later] noticed 2 fry at the mouth of the shell “

Species Profile: *Pseudotropheus demasoni*

— by Greg Steeves

For any hobbyist with an interest in cichlids, it's tough to find a better fish than *Pseudotropheus demasoni*. The demasoni is a dwarf mbuna by Malawian standards reaching an adult size of three inches.

Make no mistake however, these fish may be small, but they can definitely hold their own in a community tank.

There are not many cichlids that a demasoni will back down from.

The striking dark blue (almost black) background coloration is a vibrant contrast to the light blue striping. These boisterous little fellows appreciate lots of rockwork on which to graze. There is no noticeable sexual dimorphism. *Pseudotropheus demasoni* do well on a herbivorous diet. Spirulina based flake is perfect for demasoni. Wa-



ter parameters are not crucial; however, a high pH and hardness will closely match their native waters. Temperature around 78F seems ideal. In the wilds of Lake Malawi, *Pseudotropheus demasoni* are found at Pombo Rocks on the Tanzanian coastline.

I have found these fish mix well with other mbuna as well as *Aulonocara* and *Protomelas* species. Spawning occurs on substrate with

the male displaying to the female in a series of "shimmies and shaking". The female nips the males anal fin while dropping eggs. Both fish will then quickly turn and the female will scoop up the eggs. An interesting note here is

*“For any hobbyist with an interest in cichlids, it's tough to find a better fish than *Pseudotropheus demasoni*. “*

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that females will continue to feed while holding a clutch. We have been feeding our fish a red colored flake and when after 20 days, we stripped a holding female. The fully developed fry all had bright red bellies. This insinuates that while the female is feeding, the fry eat while in her buccal cavity. Fry are easily raised on crushed flake and will grow rapidly. Demasoni will reach sexual maturity in under a year. We have had successful spawns in aquaria as small as 20 gallons, but our present colony is housed in a 125 gallon tank and seem to thrive nicely. Spawn sizes are small in comparison to other mbuna. We have had

spawns as small as six fry and as large as 17.

There is no secret to spawning Pseudotropheus demasoni. A larger group will alleviate aggression on an individual fish. Demasoni can safely be housed with larger fish. The fluorescent blue coloration make them a sought after commodity in any mixed Malawian community tank.



Species Profile: Pundamilia nyererei

— by Greg Steeves

Pundamilia nyererei is a haplochromine type cichlid native to areas in the Mwanza Gulf region of Lake Victoria. This region consists of many islands. Each island region has its own color variant of nyererei. Maximum size of these colorful fish seem to be around three inches with the exception of Makobe Island. Pundamilia nyererei from the Makobe Island region grow larger than most of other variants with males reaching five inches. According to Yves Fermon, noted ichthyologist, nyererei grow larger in the aquarium than in their native waters. Another interesting note on these fish is the misnomer we associate with various regions containing these fish. We commonly associate a variant of nyererei with its locale; for example, the Ruti Island variant is readily available in the hobby as one distinct population whereas in the wild, Ruti Island has multiple nyererei populations each with distinct coloration. We are associating our

nyererei variants with what was imported before sanctions were placed on Victorian cichlid imports.

The Python Island variant of Pundamilia nyererei is typical of all nyererei species. This is a boisterous species. Males typically become hyper dominant sometimes killing other males which threaten his harem. A high female to male ratio should also be employed when dealing with this species. Males will harass lone females as well as other cichlids it may consider a threat. That said, once an group is established, a group of Pundamilia nyererei is a stunning sight. The Python island male will display a rainbow of colors dominated by bright



Python Island variant

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red. Many caves and obstacles should be implemented into tank decor to ensure hiding places out of sight for other fish to evade the aggression of males. Water parameters are not difficult so long as good filtration is provided and pH is maintained above seven. All food is readily accepted. High quality flake supplemented with occasional feedings of live or frozen ammonals such as brine shrimp or daphnia is perfect for these omnivores.

I have found the best way to build a breeding colony is to begin with a group of fry. I raise these fish together. They will reach breeding size at about eight months. When males start to show color, these fish are sexually mature. There is no problem inducing these fish to spawn. Females will produce clutches of fry every three months. First spawns may result in around ten fry but as the fish gets larger, so increases the number of eggs. A full sized female may have clutches of 50 fry or more. Pundamilia nyererei is far more prolific when young.

Adult fish can be tougher to get a spawning from. Although as with most fish, the bigger the tank the better, we house our nyererei breeding groups in 20 gallon tanks. They seem perfectly happy with this.

Raising the fry is also quite easy. We raise our fry in ten gallon bare tanks powered by a mature sponge filter. We offer the fry crushed flake and Cyclop-eeze.

Growth is rapid. Baby nyererei will reach an inch in size in less than two months.

Pundamilia nyererei is compatible with most Malawian mbuna. They are certainly a welcomed addition to any African cichlid collection.



Makobe Island variant

Species Profile: Thoracochromis brauschi

— by Duc Nguyen

Thoracochromis brauschi 'Fwa River' or Blood Throat Cichlid, is a maternal mouthbrooder native to the Fwa River region of Zaire. The climate is sub-tropical with temperatures in the mid 70's to 80's and native waters for this fish are pH of 7.4. I obtained six 3/4 inch long fish from Greg Steeves. Males achieve a size of 5-6 inches and have a body shape that is typical of haplochromine species with greenish coloration. Dominant males have a very distinct blood red colored throat. There's also a diagonal pattern on the dorsal fin.. Females achieve a size of 3-4 inches and

also have a body shape that is typical to haplochromine species. Body color is tan-ish green. Females lack the diagonal pattern on the dorsal fin.

The fish bred in a 55 gallon tank which contained sandy substrate and was planted with Anubias barteri, and Anubias nana. It was also lined with a number of slate rock and holey rock . The tank was filtered by a Power Bio-Wheel and had a pH of pH of 8.0. I performed weekly water changes equal to 25% of the tank volume. I used fluorescent light-

“When spawning, the red throat color of the male is intensified. “

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ing for a duration of 14 hours each day. I fed the fish TetraCichlid Cichlid Flakes, Omega One Spirulina flakes, live baby brine shrimp.

When spawning, the red throat color of the male is intensified. Females remain the same coloration. Pre spawning behavior consisted of the dominant male picking up mouthfuls of the sand from the substrate and moving them across the tank. The pair cleaned a piece of slate together. Next, the female laid an egg and picked it up in her mouth. The pair assumed a "T" position and the female then bit at the egg spot of the male fertilizing the eggs.

The pair laid approximately 20-25 eggs. After spawning, the female retreated to a hiding place to avoid harassment by the male as well as other members of the tank I moved the female to a lightly planted ten gallon tank. I used a sponge filter to provide filtration as well as a source of food for the fry. This tank provided lots of hiding places to make the female feel comfortable. Approximately 5-10 eggs representing 33% of the total hatch were viable and hatched after 20 days. The fry were yellow-white in color and about 3/8 of an inch long.

When breeding this fish, you have to be very patient. It takes quite a while for them to mature. These fish do not repro-

duce as often as most other Victorians or Mbuna-type fish. It appears to be seasonal. The females do a wonderful job of holding their clutch. This was actually one of the more difficult mouthbrooders that I've kept. I have them in a 55 with a number of Malawians (Ps. saulosi and Ps. lanisticola).

Additional tank mates are Synodontis petricola and bristlenose pleco. The male brauschi seem to be more aggressive towards co specifics and leave the others alone. The

reason they are more difficult is mainly because of the fact that they don't spawn as frequently as other mouthbrooders I've kept. While breeding Thoracochromis brauschi 'Fwa River' was challenging, I would recommend them to other keepers of Africans. They are beautiful, if aggressive, fish.

In conclusion, the best advice I could give on the Thoracochromis brauschi would just be patient with these fish. I kept mine for quite some time before I had my initial spawning (about a 1.5 yrs). They are a very slow growing fish as well. Fry will take longer than normal to grow out.



Our Far Away Members

Our club has been fortunate to have cichlid enthusiasts from outside the state (and even the country) show interest in our small organization. Recent additions to our family include people from Canada and Oklahoma. Although their attendance will be somewhat on the light

side, their input and interest in the club are greatly appreciated.

We are all fortunate to have you with us and look forward to someday meeting. Thank you very much for your interest and input.

Special Thanks: Spencer Jack

We in the Hill Country Cichlid Club are fortunate to have friends from around the planet that are helping us get our fledgling organization off to a good start. I would like to take a moment to thank one particular gentleman, Spencer Jack. Spencer is a past president, and founder of the Canadian Cichlid Association. He is also a wonderful speaker who is sponsored by the American Cichlid Association. He lectures at clubs and functions across the continent. *Spence will be giving two seminars at the Texas Cichlid Association show in April. They will include "Lake Malawi Cichlids" and "Lake Tanganyikan Cichlids".* If you get a chance to see him speak, you won't regret it. He is one of the better speakers out there and quite entertaining.

Spencer has allowed us free reign of his extensive library of excellent photographs. This has allowed us to enhance



the quality of our newsletter and website. A quick thank you to him. His help has been much appreciated.

BAP Entries

After a slow start, the Breeder Award Program entries have come in at a fast pace. At this time, 5 members have submitted entries totaling 11 successfully spawned species. Many of these offspring have already been sold to other members, spreading these wonderful species around. Any remaining unsold fish will be grown out to a "sellable" size and taken to local fish stores.

Currently in the lead is Greg Steeves with a total of 75 BAP points. For current standings, please visit www.xdeleon.com/hccc/bap. Species that have earned point include: *Pundamilia nyererei*, *Neochromis rufocaudalis*, *Pseudotropheus demasoni*, *Haplochromis* sp. "flameback",

Thoracochromis brauschi, *Julidochromis transcriptus*, *Neolamprologus multifasciatus*, *Pseudotropheus saulosi*, *Pseudotropheus acei*, *Aulonocara stuartgranti* and *Lamprologus ocellatus*.

Not only have these species earned points as Class B entries, but they have also been awarded first in species points and many of them have also included fry donations and/or BAP report points.

As time goes on, more and more species will be submitted and fry donations made. Don't wait too long before beginning to submit your entries or Greg will get too far ahead to catch. So put on some romantic music and dim the lights. I can't wait to see what the next entry will be.

HCCC members get first pick of BAP donated fish. As a member, groups of around 6 Class B fry are \$5.

Club Fundraising

We are continually trying to raise club funds for future projects or events. Our coffers are currently somewhat empty but we hope they will continue to grow.

Since we still see ourselves mainly as a group of friends talking fish, we are not collecting any membership dues at this time. We have however discussed the possibility of making \$1 donations during our monthly meetings, but this is in no way mandatory. Please don't let this discourage anyone from attending our meetings. We would rather have you come with empty pockets than not attend at all.

Once we have generated some income, we can begin contemplating the possibility of hosting some type of event. In the meantime, ideas for raising funds are appreciated. If any of you can think of a way we can raise additional funds, please let us know by posting a message in the Discussion Board.

Speaking of money but not related to fundraising issues; if you have not paid Dave for the T-shirts, please don't forget to bring your money for the next meeting. If you have forgotten how much you owe, please let Dave know and he can give you a total.

Atop a 5 Gallon Bucket

This section was created as a way for individual members to be able to contribute thoughts or concerns to everyone via this newsletter. Very similar to an editorial section.

Since there we no submission this month, I thought I would write something up. This is less of an editorial and more of a "wouldn't it be nice" idea of mine.

Several months ago I was cruising the web for fish sites (I just can't seem to get enough). Anyway, I came across another association's site. In it was a section on member's fishrooms. This brings up something we may want to consider for the website or possibly this newsletter.

Back to my "wouldn't it be nice". One of the fishrooms was much more than a fishroom, but a fishroom experiment.

Turns out a member of this club had their own fish business which unfortunately failed. What the owner decided to do was to open it up to a few other members as a multi-user fishroom. If you were lucky enough to be there when it all began, you would have dozens of tanks, all different sizes you could use for your fish. Between all the people that were part of experiment, they paid for the rent and expenses associated with the facility. The club would regularly have meetings at this location and enjoy the many tanks full of a variety of fish.

Some of us are fortunate enough to have large spaces where we can have our own fishrooms, but some of use aren't. Wouldn't it be nice is we could have something like this. So, if you have a fish store and are going out of business, let me know :-).

For more information about the HCCC,
visit our site at www.xdeleon.com/hccc