

The Lateral Line

Volume 2, Issue 19

February 2007



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February 15, 2007

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Cover Photo:
*Neolamprologus
tretocephalus*
By Dave Hansen

BAP Report

January was a cold month for us South Texas Natives and even though there were few BAP reports, they all carried achievements with them.

Duc's (Bassic) entry of *Neetroplus nematopus* was a 1st of species spawn. The total points (205) with this spawn entitled him the "Advanced Breeder" award. Congratulations Duc on both the 1st of species and "AB" award.

Robert (Ripple) entry of "Christmas Fulu" came at an appropriate time of the year. The *Xystichromis phytophagus* common name indicates the brilliant colors of this fish during breeding. Not only a pretty fish but is listed on the "Endangered Species". Congratulations Robert on your entry and for contributing to the welfare of future generations of this species.

Congratulations to Greg (Mokkers) who advanced to the "Breeders Award" level for breeding 5 different species. Greg now has 7 entries which total 120 point moving him closer to next level. Congratulations Greg, keep up the good work.

Another member reached a new level in the BAP with his 5th entry that entitles him to the "Breeder Award". Congratulations to Eric (EAKF) on this achievement and continued success with your fish in the future.

Because I was excited for David (Dockusan) accomplishment of Breeder of the Year for 2006, I overlooked another accomplishment of his. His last report for 2006 placed him over the 400 point level which entitles him to HCCC Accomplished Breeder Award. Congratulations on this achievement Doc and keep them coming.

■ Jim Beck

Species Profile:***Apistogramma* sp. Rotpunkt**

Apistogramma sp. Rotpunkt is a substrate spawner native to the Rio Orinoco valley, Venezuela. The climate is sub-tropical with temperatures in the mid 70's to 80's and native waters for this fish are pH of 6. I obtained six 1/2 inch long fish from a fellow hobbyist last year. Males achieve a size of 3 inches and are pale yellow to gold with powder blue markings around the jaw and a black horizontal stripe laterally equidistant. Females achieve a size of 2 inches and are pale yellow to electric yellow with black vertical barring especially when agitated. They also have an exaggerated black stripe on the leading of the pectoral fins. Males have this as well, but they have long trailing edges that are a light peach tone.

The fish bred for me in a 15-gallon tank, which contained medium blasting media and was planted with java fern and somewhat of an algae mat. The tank was filtered by an Aquaclear hang on back filter running with one sponge and one sock full of peat moss pebbles made by Fluval. I performed weekly water changes roughly 40% of the tank volume. I used fluorescent lighting for a duration of 14 hours each day. I fed the fish flake food as a staple with supplements of bloodworms, blackworms, and brine shrimp.

When spawning, the blue color of the male intensifies and he wants to display his plumage. The females change to a bright yellow and the black vertical bar markings fade a bit. They seem to breed in caves. I've spawned them in

PVC elbows buried in the gravel, and I have several inverted clay pots with 3/4" holes drilled in the side. After low pressure systems move through, cold water (several degrees up to 15 or so), preferably rainwater should be added to the tank to attempt to induce spawning. You're trying to simulate a flood in the river, so I usually feed worms or other high protein items for a few days prior at the minimum, and then perform a water change with the colder water.

The pair laid approximately 25 or so eggs. After spawning, the female retreated to a hiding place for the fry (her clay pot). She ferociously attacks anyone who dares come near save for the male she spawned with, and even then she is wary. She is quite the doting mother taking the kids on "walks" about the tank and herding them back to the safety of the cave. Due to her ferocity, this is when I believe the female aggression issues come about. After a while the fry get to be big enough no one else in the tank will eat them and the survivors are left alone. They tend to be quite boisterous at the front of the tank prior to reaching maturity. I actually left the tank alone and let the mom take care of the kids, and had 10 or so from each spawning. The fry were a yellow-tan in color and about 5 millimeters long and looked like a pair of eyeballs with a tail for the first week or so.

The fry didn't require any special care on my part. I left them in the 20 gallon tank with the

parents and they did great, with minimal losses. Once the female released the fry from her care, she did not exhibit any tendency to exhibit any favoritism toward the fry. I started the fry off on crushed flake and ground freeze-dried bloodworms. The fry grew moderately, and now 4-5 months later they are $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch long now, and starting to color up.

These fish are very active prior to spawning. They tend to just frolic about the tank freely. Once the spawning begins however, the females turn a canary yellow, and take on a highly defensive status around their home of choice. These fish breed in a harem-polygynous manner, which consists of several females locating small caves to reside in with the dominant male protecting the territory, actively driving away intruders.

I really enjoyed keeping these fish. They provide a lot of spunk in a small easy to keep size, and have very interesting habits, especially as parents. For their reputation as being difficult to keep I found quite the opposite to be true. I would definitely recommend this species to other fish keepers looking for an interesting group of fish while staying in a size constraint,

but I wouldn't hesitate to put them in a larger tank in order to see the expanse of territory they will command if allowed to. While it's probably not best suited to the beginner, it would be an excellent choice for an intermediate level hobbyist.

Be prepared to deal with very aggressive females at spawning time and offer lots of cover both at the bottom and top of the tank. In the wild these fish are found in leaf litter and debris and seem to enjoy it in the aquarium as well. I also found that they are not too picky about the water quality with regard to nitrates. I actually think most fish thrive more on consistency, then quality, and that the stability thru neglect of the tank conditions can actually provide a suitable condition for spawning if they are well fed and the pressure drops. Due to their habitat in leaf debris and plant leaves, these are probably not the best choice for someone who desires pristine clear water looking tank. My dominant female beat up both males and females on a regular basis, and even killed off a couple of males that were several times bigger than she is on several occasions, so be prepared to deal with a death or two. Remember this is still part of the life cycle. The rotpunkts will give you lots of ups and downs like a roller coaster, as they breed, and entertain family life, and then have squabbles that can end in the sudden death of a beloved family member. All in all this is a most interesting species worthy of keeping.

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■ *Eric Foreman*

DIY Article:**Aquarium Background**

The supplies you'll need are styrofoam, knives, a blow dryer or heat gun, Quikrete Mason Mix Cement, Quikrete Concrete Acrylic Fortifier, cheap 2" paint brush, 100% silicone caulking, and Concrete paint (optional).



The first step is to cut the styrofoam to the size that will cover the back of the aquarium. I put tape down on the garage floor to the dimensions of the tank so I could set up the background there. Plan for the styrofoam to be in 3 pieces. If you don't, the complete structure won't fit into the aquarium (for larger aquari-

ums) because of the cross bar in the middle. It helps if you cut these 3 pieces in a puzzle-like fashion so they'll lock together in the tank. They can be cemented together at that time with the 100% silicone caulking.

Next, using silicone caulking, glue smaller, miscellaneous pieces of styrofoam onto the larger pieces so that you have 3 large sheets with 1-2 layers of smaller pieces on top. Next, you'll need to cut holes in the styrofoam in order to make it appear like a rock formation. You could even create some caves and tunnels if you wish (this is where a smaller knife comes in handy). I used an electric kitchen knife to cut the styrofoam pieces to size and desired shape. Make sure you allow places for filtration and other tank accessories when designing your background.

Once you have your basic shape cut and crafted, you can heat the surface using either the heat gun or blow dryer in order

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to smooth out the styrofoam's sharp corners. The knives can also be used for this while cutting the styrofoam pieces to size. This and all subsequent steps should be done outside or in



another suitable, well-ventilated area.

Once you are happy with the three individual styrofoam pieces, it's time for the cement. I cemented my three styrofoam pieces outside of the fish tank completely. You could install your styrofoam now and do the following steps with the tank laying on it's back. I followed the instructions for mixing on the cement bag, but then added the Acrylic Fortifier per the directions, and then added additional water until the cement was very runny. I applied this layer using the paint brush to ensure a complete layer over the styrofoam. This layer's function is to bond with the styrofoam and provide a surface for the remaining cement to bond to. Coat each of the three large pieces and then allow it to cure for at least 24 hours before continuing. I coated the back surface of my background with this layer, but it is not necessary.

The second layer is where you will get the bulk of your cement forming and further

development of the rocky look. Mix the cement following the mixing instructions on the cement bag, and then add some more cement powder until the cement will hold it's shape.

Then, using your hands, apply the cement all over your background until it has your desired shape. Once complete, allow this layer

to cure for at least 48 hours.

The final layer provides the finishing touches.



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If you want to add concrete paint, this is the time to do it. Mix the cement so it is runny and can be applied with a paint brush. Then, coat the entire background with this layer. While doing this, you need to decide if you want a smooth look, or a rough texture. You may need to adjust the mixture in order to get the right

look. I went with the rough texture, so I left my final coat runny, and applied it with a brush over the rougher second layer. If you wanted a smoother texture, you would need to make it a little less runny, and apply it with hands or brush to get the right look, filling in the gaps on the second layer. Once complete, allow this layer to cure for at least 48 hours.

Follow these next guidelines regardless of when you're putting the background into the tank. You need to coat the back of the styrofoam heavily with the silicon. Use it all up. The buoyancy of the styrofoam needs a lot of silicon to hold it down. Obviously, add one piece at a time, apply the silicon right before putting the piece in the tank. It helps to set the pieces up outside of the tank to make sure you have everything right. Once all pieces are in the tank, you need to allow at least 24 hours for the silicon to cure. To be safe, wait the time specified for a total cure on the silicon itself. It must be totally cured before adding water, otherwise the silicon may give way.

Once you've added water, setup a pump to circulate the water. Check the pH after the first day, it should be elevated. Perform 50% water changes every 2 days or so for at least 2 weeks. If the pH was elevated, wait until it is consistently back at your normal level. In my opinion, it's better to be safe. My tank actually



had water in it for a month before I added my first fish.

At this point, your tank is ready to go! Your fish will enjoy the caves and other features you've added for them.

■ Paul Barber

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Species Profile:**Yssichromis sp. "blue tipped"**

The genus name *Yssichromis* is Greek based in "ysson" meaning javelin or arrow correlating to the elongated slender body shape exhibited by these cichlids. These are usually smaller fish with pointed (arrow shaped) heads with a low straight or slightly convex cranial slope. The outer rows of both jaws are made up of un-



equally bicuspid teeth foremost, and tricuspid towards the rear. Small tricuspid teeth make up the inner rows. The lower jaw extends beyond the upper similar to *Prognathochromis* (*Tridontochromis*) species. The premaxillary is not as obvious as the fore mentioned species. The eyes of *Yssichromis* species are comparatively larger than most other *Haplochromines*.

Most *Yssichromis* are considered zooplanktivores. Until the late 70's this representatives from the genus were abundant in many portions of Lake Victoria. With the up surge of *Lates niloticus* in the 1980's, *Yssichromis* numbers dropped off dramatically. In the early 1990's,

various *Yssichromis* species began to appear once again in samplings. Numbers of some species (*Y. laprogramma*) were more abundant in the mid 90's than initial estimates in the 70's (Goldschmidt 1990, Seehausen 1997). Usually thought of as an open water schooling fish (comparative to the *Cyprichromis* species of Lake Tanganyika) some *Yssichromis* found refuge from the Nile perch by blending in with large schools of cyprinid (*Rastrineobola argentea*).

Yssichromis sp. "blue tipped" was discovered in 1992 by Yves Fermon and Olivier Berthelot off Rusinga Island Lake Victoria. This schooling species feeds upon zooplankton and will also take small insects in the wild. Maximum size is near 10cm for males, slightly smaller for females. The body shape is slender and elongated with a straight cranial slope. The lower jaw extends slightly beyond the upper. Subdominant males have a dull red-purple back with a lighter tan colored line directly under the dorsal fin. The flanks are light lime-green with dotted with dark blotching along the mid body. The blotches run along, and are part of very faint vertical bar-

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ring. The abdomen is light brown. Two dark blotches on the caudal region are joined by a thin black bar running between them. The caudal fin is translucent. The dorsal has a light blue coloration. This is where the descriptive name was derived. The anal fin is also clear with two well defined egg spots dotting the upper rear portion. Females are mostly silver in color. They have the same black blotching



Photo by Greg Steeves

mid laterally that is found in males. These blotches run into each other forming an almost continuous solid line. The pelvic, anal and caudal fins have a yellow tinge to them. Some blue can be seen on the forward portion of the dorsal. Dominant males sport jet-black body coloration. This black is so intense that when reflected by light, a green sheen appears. The dorsal fin is metallic-blue frontally and the remaining portion black. There is a yellow edging to this fin. The caudal fin is black with yellow edging. The yellow coloration is thicker at both points on the fin than between them. The anal fin is black at the base with lighter colored rays. The outer portions are yellow. The (usually) two orange ocelli are

surrounded by a solid black orbit. The pelvic fins are black with the first ray elongated.

Being an open water species, we house our group in a 65 gallon deep tank with a silica sand substrate. One side of this tank contains a small rock work structure. A few strands of artificial *Vallisneria* are situated in the middle of the tank. Filtration is provided by an Aquaclear® 300 hang on the back power filter. Weekly water changes of twenty gallons help maintain acceptable conditions. The *Yssichromis* sp. "blue tipped" are housed with a colony of *Platytaeniodus* sp. "blue neon" of similar size. This mixture works well as both species are distinct enough that hybridization is unlikely. The rock structure is used by the *Platytaeniodus* sp. "blue neon" as a territorial boundary but has little attraction to the *Yssichromis* sp/ "blue tipped". Neither species is overly aggressive with the other; squabbles are restricted to co specs. The *Platytaeniodus* sp. "blue neon" prefer to remain near the bottom while the *Yssichromis* sp. "blue tipped" are usually roaming the upper portion of the aquaria. There are occasional bluffing duels between the most dominant males of each species but these are no more than jetting forward in an attempt to back the other up. There is no physical contact or jaw locking that occurs.

As male coloration darkens, one can be certain that spawning activity is already in the works. In our colony, two males suddenly turned jet-black with intense yellow edging to the fins. The next two days were spent bluffing one another with jetting runs at one an-

other. Both males were of equal size and neither gave in. Each maintained dominant coloration and began courting an obviously ripe female. As of yet I have been unable to witness an actual spawning but have observed the pre-spawning dance on multiple occasions. The spawning advances occur in mid strata. The female roamed from one side of the tank to the other enticing each male to shake wildly presumably provoking her into mating. After two days, one of the males had obviously succeeded in winning the female over as she had a definite extended buccal cavity. The female is not harassed at all while incubating her young. We waited for 14 days and stripped her. She had 12 nearly free swimming fry. The young were placed in an egg tumbler for two days while the remaining egg sac was absorbed. The free swimming young are now in a 20 gallon tank where they are growing rapidly on a diet of Cyclop-eeze® and crushed basic flake. The fry are hardy and present no problems with regards to rearing. Filtration in the fry tank is provided by a sponge filter. Ideally, a five gallon water change should be done twice a week.

I suspect that spawning occurs on the tank bottom. The first two occasions I had a female hold she was found to only be carrying small stones when stripped. It is probable that she had picked up these stones with her own eggs and through the process of tumbling them around her throat, they disintegrated over time. Once we changed the substrate to silica sand, this problem disappeared.

Yssichromis sp. "blue tipped" ("tipped blue" as named by Fermon and Berthelot) is a very rare

fish in the North American hobby. It is not held in the LVSSP program so it is up to the hobbyist to ensure its survival. Wild populations figures are unknown but like the others



Photo by Greg Steeves

members of the genus, it should be considered at risk.

■ Greg Steeves

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Event Calendar:**Upcoming Events in Texas**

All of the information has been obtained from other club's websites. Dates and times have not been confirmed. Please check with each clubs if you plan to attend any of their events. This list may not be complete so don't assume every event is included here.

February:

February 17th

Time: 7 P.M.

Texas Cichlid Association—Regular monthly at the Clarion Hotel DFW South in Irving.

March:

Hill Country Cichlid Club—Date, Time and Location TBD.

March 17th

Time: 7 P.M.

Texas Cichlid Association—Regular Monthly Meeting at the home of David Andrews, 3828 Wayland Drive, Fort Worth. Phone: (817) 291-4169

March 18th

Time: 11 A.M.

Houston Aquarium Society—Spring Live Fish Auction. Doors open at 10 A.M. for sellers. American Legion Post, 11702 Galveston Rd., Houston.

April:

April 13th-15th

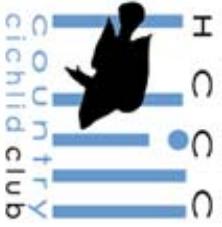
Texas Cichlid Association—Spring Show and Workshop at the Clarion Hotel DFW South in Irving. Confirmed speakers to date include Ad Konings and Greg Steeves.

April 15th

Time: 2 P.M.

Hill Country Cichlid Club—Monthly meeting at Jeff Johnson's house. Details to follow.

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