

The Lateral Line

Volume 2, Issue 13

July 2006



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Upcoming Events:

- July meeting on the 30th in Austin
- August meeting on the 20th in San Antonio
- HCCC auction September 2nd in San Antonio.

Cover Photo:
Cynotilapia afra
 Cobue albino
 by Jennifer Prince
 owned by David
 Dockwiller

BAP Report

June has come and gone and leaves only four more months left in the BAP year. So remember your fry must be free swimming for 60 days before October 31st of this year to eligible for BAP entries.

June started off with Robert (Ripple) entering a spawning of *Eretmodus cyanostictus* "Goby cichlid". Congratulations Robert on this "C" class spawning. Eric (EAKF) had two entries in June, *Cichlasoma nigrofasciatum* "Convict", and *Pseudotropheus acei*. Congratulations Eric on your spawns this month and with the one report still pending, you will reach the next level, Breeders Award.

The level of Advanced Breeder (200 points) was attained by two members this month. Dave (Mullet) reached this goal with the donation of the parents of a previous BAP entry, *Haplochromis* species. I also was able to attain the goal of 200 points with the spawning of *Neolaprogus brevis* "Sunspot". Congratulations to Dave and me on reaching this level and we are on our way to Accomplished Breeder level.

■ Jim Beck

Current Standings	
Name	YTD
Charles	310
Greg S.	285
Jim	105
Jennifer	85
Diane	75
David D.	60
Lisa	40

Current Standings (cont)	
Name	YTD
Eric	40
Nick	35
Greg W.	30
Dave H.	30
Robert	25
Duc	25
Walter	20

HCCC Monthly Photo Contest



First Place
Donald Davis
Tropheus Bembas



Second Place
Greg and Lee Ann Steeves
Altolamprologus calvus



Third Place
Duc Nguyen
Paracyprichromis nigripinnis

Judging by Pam Chin

Species Profile:***Gephyrychromis (Pseudotropheus) acei***

Gephyrychromis acei or the Yellow Tailed acei is also sometimes sold incorrectly as *Pseudotropheus acei*, is a maternal mouthbrooder native to the rocky shoreline of Lake Malawi, Africa often found swirling around docks and sunken logs in schools numbering in the thousands. The climate is sub-tropical with temperatures in the mid 70's to 80's and native waters for this fish have a pH of 8+. I obtained six 1 1/2 inch long fish from Amazonia aquariums and Aquatek Austin . Males achieve a size of 6 inches and are metallic blue, with a standard Mbuna shape featuring white accenture on their dorsal fin when breeding. They also tend to have more pointed fin tips. Females achieve a size of 5 inches or so and are metallic blue as well, with the standard Mbuna shape. Their fin tips tend to be more rounded.



Photo by Eric Foreman

The fish bred in a 29 gallon tank which contained medium blasting media gravel and was planted with no plants due to the vegetarian nature of this species. The tank was filtered by a Rena xp3 and an old penguin HOB and had a pH of 8.8. I performed weekly water changes equal to 40% of the tank volume. I used fluorescent lighting for a duration of 14-16 hours each day. I fed the fish spirulina flake, homemade frozen food (ground peas, zucchini, tomatoes, carrots, shrimp (shells on), solidified

with unflavored gelatin).

When spawning, the blue color of the male intensifies. The dorsal fin sports a whitish color when erect. Females remain the same. I haven't actually been so lucky as to witness the actual act of spawning yet. But from reliable sources I have read that it is basically the same as other mbuna. The pair does their

shimmy dance, circling each other. the female lays the eggs one at a time and quickly reverses over the egg and picks it up with her mouth. She repeats this process until all the eggs are laid and at which point the pair assumes a "T" position and the female then bites at the egg spot of the male's caudal fin fertilizing the eggs as he releases his milt into her mouth.

The pair lays approximately 30-70 eggs. After spawning, the female holds the eggs for ap-

proximately 2 weeks, at which point I have either placed the female in a 10 gallon tank of her own leaving her to release the fry, or stripped her. After the fry have been released or stripped they are placed in a 10 gallon tank filtered with a sponge filter. I'm not sure how



Photo by Eric Foreman

many of the total hatch were viable, but they seem to hatch after 10-14 days. The fry are a whitish yellow if they still have some yolk sac to consume. Other wise they are a mottled black or brown color until they are around 3/4 of an inch at which point they start to color up.

The fry don't require any special care on my part other than their own fry tank with regular feedings two to three times a day. Which is expected with most fry anyways. The tank used a basic clover sponge filter for filtration. Once the female released the fry, she did not exhibit any tendency to care for the fry so she gets placed back into the

general population. I started the fry off on freeze dried brine shrimp crumbles and crushed flake food. The fry grew fairly quickly and began to color up nicely.

These are extremely active fish that seem to benefit from the "packing of the tank". due to this it is possible to have a large number of fish in a relatively small tank. It seems that the victimized fish is able to get lost amongst the other fish and seek refuge in the rocks. For an example at one point I had around 25 2" fry growing out with the parents, and eight medium size yellow labs who also thought the tank was a good place to breed. granted the tank was insanely over filtered at the time, but even setup as it is now with just the old penguin HOB the conditions are still good enough to get regular spawns. This was actually the first mouthbrooder I have bred. The first few spawns I didn't realize what exactly was happening and how to care for the fry so only a few survived each time (which were predominately male) after seeing the regularity with which they were spawning, I

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became much more proactive in my approach to getting fry. Initially I was against stripping fry and would let the female release on her own in a separate tank. In my ignorance I thought



Photo by Spencer Jack

this was a better way to treat the female. Something about grabbing a fish in your hand and forcibly opening her mouth and dunking her head in and out of water just seemed inhumane. However I have since witnessed that upon reentry into the main tank the female gets far more beat up and stressed out after several days absence than a quick stripping and replacement. From what I have read this is due to the rearrangement of the fish's social structure on the removal and addition of fish.

This is a great species for any beginner to keep as it is flashy, active, and has cool spawning habits. Not to mention that as a bread and butter fish for aquarium stores there is almost always a market for fry.

Be prepared to deal with very aggressive males and offer lots of rocks and slate with tons of hiding places and several flat surfaces for breeding. While these fish seem to be fine in the 29 gallon tank, I'd be willing to bet that they would feel more at home in something larger. And since you can really pack them in the tank, something like a 75 or larger with several other Mbuna species would prove to be quite the impressive show tank with all the flashing, fighting and swimming going on. Overall this is a great species to keep if you're looking for a vegetarian Mbuna type to add to your hard water African tank. With regular water changes and a steady diet of spirulina flake or vegetable based food with the occasional skipped feeding day, I think anyone young or old could have great success and lots of enjoyment from this species.

■ *Eric Foreman*

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Member Article:**5 Steps to Overcoming Cichlid (Addiction) Loss**

While we rarely think of cichlids as being in line with chocolate, alcohol, smoking, and drugs, they can be just as addictive - and the loss just as hard to overcome. That's especially true when there are so many varieties to choose from (Tanganyikan, Victorian, Malawian and South and Central American cichlids...oh, my head spins!!!) when visiting the LFS and researching online. Other club members on occasion offer low cost alternatives that unknowingly - or knowingly as they, too, are addicted - fuel that addiction. Many have come to rely on their tanks, not as an item that just decorates the wall to fill a space much like an ordinary piece of furniture would, but as one of life's necessities (even if it means there is no real furniture in the room except a chair or bed at most). They won't leave the fish store without a new cichlid (or two or three or four...), and some cannot even browse the awesome monthly sales at the LFS without finding that 'must have' 'rare' cichlid on the list to buy. These are signs of cichlid addiction. If this sounds anything like you - and you have to put the hobby on hold due to a move or other change in life - follow this five-step program to help you get through it.

1. Admit that you have an addiction.

As with any kind of addiction, the addict is often the last person to know. The first step is to admit to yourself that you really have an addiction, and to truly believe that. If you don't

understand your problem, you can't solve it. Once you've admitted your cichlid addiction, make a commitment to yourself to beat that feeling of loss. Write that commitment down in a short contract with yourself: No more cichlids....not even those cute little shell dwellers or Apistos. They are addictive. You cannot even have just one 10-20 gallon tank right now.

2. Ask for support from loved ones - Going cold turkey.

I'm not talking about financial support here. They are not going to buy one that you can set up "for them". You need to find at least one person that you can trust explicitly, and confide in them. Tell them about your addiction. Ask them to serve as your moral support, and to encourage you if you should "fall off the wagon" with that betta bowl.

3. Make amends.

Your cichlid addiction has likely put a slight damper on family time. Take that family vacation to a non-fish related destination. (No

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trips to Chicago that just so happen to be hosting ACA that week.) Plan a weekend that does not involve a local fish store other place where the words 'fish', 'cichlid', or 'aquarium' will come up in the topic of conversation - unless you come across a great little restaurant with a nice cichlid aquarium on display and just so happens to serve fish. Let your family know they will always come first.

4. Find something else to do.

If you cannot keep them, join them. After your family has grown accustomed to seeing you more often and they are appeased, plan for another hobby. Photography, for example, can be rewarding and complementary to keeping cichlids - as well as keeping the addiction loss under control. Aquatic photography is becoming easier as cameras improve. It is a good excuse to visit fellow addicts, too. Other suggestions would be woodworking - improving skills for future aquarium stand design; Artistry - helps to remember what a cichlid looks like when they can be turned into a work of art, Reading - maybe do some research on the original expeditions where your favorite cichlids were collected.

5. The breakdown.

Once you've dealt with the emotional and psychological aspects of your cichlid loss and your life changes have subsided, it's time to start taking action and

plan for Phase Two - reintroducing yourself into the cichlid hobby with tanks. The first thing to do is set a budget for yourself. Evaluate where your money was going, and decide where it can be best used in the future. Discuss your budget and goals with your family, because it will likely affect them, and they can give you suggestions for ways make concessions without giving up what's most important to you [your family] and your cichlid hobby. Hopefully the outcome will be worth the wait - A true fish room or the ultimate tank setup as well as a happy family.

■ *Jennifer Prince*



Photo by Jennifer Prince

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Species Profile:***Platytaeniodus* sp. "red tail sheller"**

Although the waterways of the Lake Victoria region contain some of the most brilliantly colored cichlid fish on the planet, much confusion often accompanies their nomenclature. Much progress has been made scientifically describing and classifying these species but there is much more work to do. Many undescribed species go



Photo by Dave Hansen

by common descriptive names that were usually given by the collector in the field in an attempt to categorize the many new discoveries. In other cases, additional names are given by importers, distributors or hobbyists. This can be very confusing especially when more than one moniker is given to a single species. It would seem that this is the case with the *Platytaeniodus* sp. "red tail sheller".

To the best of my knowledge, "red tail sheller" was the name given to a beautiful little molluscivore collected near Hippo Point on the Kenyan

shoreline of Lake Victoria. It became an ideal captive species and made its way into aquaria across Europe and North America. Somewhere along the way (and rather recently) a hobbyist in the US decided to rename the species *Haplochromis* sp. "blue neon". I'm not exactly certain of why the new name arose (similar cases

are usually the attempt by an individual to create the excitement of a new species for financial gain) and all it has succeeded in doing was creating additional unneeded confusion. This species was assigned to the generic "catch all" genus of *Haplochromis*. The *Haplochromis* classification has become a scientific holding pattern for the cichlids of the region until further research and information can be gathered to properly classify the undescribed.

In 1956, Greenwood reexamined Boulenger's 1906 description of *Platytaeniodus degeni*. Characteristics distinct to this species included a wider and more robust premaxillary as compared to other haplochromine types from the region. The dental pattern is "U" shaped with wide tooth bands at the back of the mandibles. There are between 4 and 7 tooth rows. The "red tail sheller" also processes these traits and superficially, there is no difference in body structure between the *degeni* and "red tail sheller". The only visible difference I was able to observe was the intensity of coloration on the "red tail sheller" was more vibrant among dominant males than that of the *degeni*. Body structure, torso patterning, distri-

bution of color is quite close in both fish. Any discrepancy is certainly no greater than individual variation within a species. Perhaps the most striking similarity is the distinct cranial structure. Both fish are snail shellers in the wild. *Platytaeniodus degeni* was said to have a wide distribution throughout Lake Victoria before the upsurge of *Lates niloticus*. One cannot help but consider the possibility that the red tail sheller be a locale variant of *P. degeni*. I'm sure when the time comes for closer classification, this possibility will be examined but in the meantime, and the two fish are considered separate species. It is with certainty that the "red tail sheller" be placed in the same genus as the *degeni*, *Platytaeniodus*. Other sources have referred to *P. sp.* "red tail sheller" as a *Ptyochromis*. The members of the *Ptyochromis* genus consist of snail shellers as well. The most obvious difference between the two groups of fish is the dental pattern. *Ptyochromis* species taper off to a single row of teeth posteriorly whereas the teeth of *Platytaeniodus* species come to an end bluntly. The jaws of *Ptyochromis* species protrude evenly unlike *Platytaeniodus*.

Platytaeniodus sp. "red tail sheller" grows to an adult size of 14cm. There is little dimorphism between the sexes with the female perhaps remaining slightly smaller than the male. The male goes through many color variances. Darker coloration is directly correlated to dominance. The flanks are lined with nine vertical dark bars. There is a slender mid lateral stripe as well as a dorsal stripe following the lateral line. The body is a dark blue, almost black in the most dominant of males, and lighter as the fish in a colony move down the pecking order. The caudal fin is a brilliant crimson red. The anal fin is dark at the base

flowing to a red hue at the outer portions. One or two well developed orange ocelli with a clear orbit dot the rear portion of the anal fin. The dorsal fin is blue with red edging growing more pronounced toward the posterior. The pectoral fins are jet black. There is a wide bar beginning at the corner of the mouth and continuing through the eye. There is another black bar running vertically half way up the gill plate. The cranial slope is convex with a pronounced premaxillary hump at eye level. The mouth is turned down with the upper jaw protruding slightly beyond the lower. Female coloration is a tan silver coloration with a pronounced mid



Photo by Greg Steeves

lateral horizontal bar. The dorsal and caudal fins have red edging. The base coloration of the anal and caudal fins is translucent with a yellow tinge. The anal fin contains a single primitive egg spot. Females sort a pecking order out amongst themselves as well with the dominant female displaying the most color.

I was fortunate to receive a small group from Rare Dave Schumacher. At that time they were

4cm, colorless with a checkerboard body pattern. I had previous experience maintaining *P. degeni* and used much of what I had learned setting up the tank for my new *P. sp.* "red tail sheller". The colony was placed in a 65 gallon tall tank with similar sized *Yssichromis sp.* "blue tipped". A rock formation was constructed at one end with artificial *Vallisneria* clumped in a group at the other. Mid tank contained open areas. The substrate consisted of coarse white sand. An Aquaclear® 300 creates current and helps maintain water quality. Bi-weekly 20 gallon water changes are carried out. There are no heaters on my tanks and this time of year in south Texas, the water temperature in my fish room sometimes gets close to 90°F. So long as close attention is given to water quality (warmer water is less forgiving) the fish suffer no ill effects. The colony is fed basic flake and small shrimp pellets.



Photo by Greg Steeves

Once the fish matured, it became apparent that I had six males and two females in my group. Males began squabbling for the best real estate in the tank. This "prime location" is an area near a rock pile where a pit can be excavated. Maintaining this pit and defending the area from co specs is a full time job. Other males nearby continuously balk at one another trying to stretch the limits of their territory. This is highly entertaining for the spectator as well as for the ripening females. The males that are not able to secure any primo areas resort to excavating their pits at the corners of a tank. This gives the appearance

of a well designed bower. When the male is satisfied with his construction, he intermediately turns his attention to the other sex. Frantic dancing in front of a prospective mate with the objective being to lure the female to his pit for procreation commences. The female will look at the pit briefly. If she shows any indecision, she is quickly driven away by the male. This is all forgotten once she wanders near his pit again. He once again meets her with the frantic "haplochromine shake". Eventually she finds an excavation to her liking, or perhaps it's the males dance, but she gives in. Circling ensues with the male displaying his outstretched anal

fin against the substrate and the female nuzzling at his ocelli. Once the female has picked up her eggs, she is driven from the male's territory. She is usually not harassed and can incubate her brood in relative peace. Small brood sizes of 12 larvae are normal. It is sometimes tough to tell if a female is holding because the buccal cavity is not noticeably enlarged. Three tell tale signs of a brooding female is a subtle constant "chewing" motion, lack of eating (although I

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have seen incubating females nibble slightly at food), and, when observing from the rear, the gills flare noticeably. The incubation period lasts 18 days at which point the females will release the fry periodically to forage. They retreat back into her mouth at the slightest twist of her head (presumably the signal that danger is near). After two weeks the fry are ignored and left to fend for themselves. I have both separated a holding female to a small tank, and more frequently stripped after two weeks. Both methods have been successful. Rearing the fry has been undemanding. They take readily to crushed flake and Cyclop-eeze®. The fry grow rapidly and have a high survival rate.

It has been noted by others that *P. sp.* "red tail sheller" is an aggressive fish with its own kind. Perhaps I've just been fortunate that my group has coexisted well together. I think a larger tank is needed to successfully house a colony and maybe the lopsided ratio of males to females is actually working in my favor. Perhaps the males are able to spread their aggression in the form of territory defense with one another, deferring the violence that might be directed towards the females in other arrangements.

As the name implies, *P. sp.* "red tail sheller" should eat snails. I have had Malaysian trumpet snails *Melanoides tuberculata* inhabit the tanks of both *P. degeni* and *P. sp.* "red tail sheller" but have never observed their snail eating behavior. Perhaps this is a case of an unfamiliar snail species or adapting to a more readily available food source (commercial aquarium food). Whatever the case, this incredibly beautiful little cichlid is a fantastic species for the hobbyist to maintain. A little understanding and providing basic require-

ments is all that is needed to be entertained with years of enjoyment from this, one of the most endearing little cichlid species from Lake Victoria.

References:

■ *Greg Steeves*



Photo by Greg Steeves

—Thanks to Kevin Bauman, Dave Schumacher and Nick Andreola for their insightful observations.

—Greenwood, P.H. "Towards a phyletic classification of the 'genus' *Haplochromis* (Pisces, Cichlidae) and related taxa. Part II; the species from Lakes Victoria, Nabugabo, Edward, George and Kivu. *Bulletin of the British Museum of Natural History (Zoology)*, 39 (1): 1-101 (October 30th, 1980).

—Greenwood, P.H. "The monotypic genera of cichlid fishes in Lake Victoria". *Bulletin of the British Museum of Natural History (Zoology)*, 3 (7): 295-333 (February, 1956).

Species Profile:

Multi Personality Disorder

Am I talking about Multiple Personality Disorder? In a way, I am. But not regarding you, or me, or someone's dear Aunt Fullalla. I am referring to the personality quirks of the *Neolamprologus multifasciatus* Mbita in my Tanganyikan community tank.

I have a small species tank of *Neolamprologus multifasciatus*, or Multies. They behave just as I expected. They spend their time near their



Photo by Greg Steeves

shells, periodically landscaping, and spawning. The fry have taken over two-thirds of the tank, leaving the adults (1m: 3f) to their original one-third. Everyone lives together reasonably happily, save the occasional squabble over food or shell space. It is a fun tank.

The Multies in my Tanganyikan community tank, on the other hand, keep me guessing. Per-

haps the veterans out there could have told me this would happen, but I, as a novice fish keeper and being entirely new to cichlids, really had no idea. Yes, I expected these wee little fish to have personalities. But I expected them to have sheldweller personalities. Protect the shell; make babies; eat a lot; fight a little. These four little guys have blown my theory out of the water (pardon the pun).

This small colony consists of two males and two females; they are adults but have yet to spawn for me. They are much too confused for that. The larger of the males voluntarily moved out of the shell bed into a small cave I have in the tank for my *Synodontis petricola*. I thought that was a little odd, but who am I to quibble with a fish wanting a more spacious abode. I didn't think it extremely weird until I noticed he was defending the cave against the other Multies but living quite happily with the *petricola* swimming in and out at will.

Then he started swimming with the *petricola* after lights out. Now, forgive my ignorance, but aren't sheldwellers supposed to tuck themselves into their shells (or caves in this case) when night falls? The others do.

I added some *Cyprichromis leptosoma* Utinta to the tank. I expected that the Multies might enjoy the additional activity (as if 10 *S. petricola* isn't enough) and was not surprised when they ventured out of their shells and catfish

cave to check out the action. But I really didn't expect them to actually school with the cyps. But they do. OK, Mr. Catfish stays with the *petricola*, and one of the females – I'll get to her in a minute. But the other male and female school with the cyps. At least they have the sense to return to their shells periodically, though. They haven't abandoned their true na-



Photo by Greg Steeves

ture to become hive-minded mouthbrooders. Yet.

Finally, I will relate the confusion of my small female. She tries to be a Multi; she really does. She hovers above the opening and protects her home. She dances for the boys at the entrance when they happen by. She zips out for food and heads right back. She dives in at the first sight of danger or something new. The problem is that she doesn't live in a shell. She lives in a strawberry pot. The main entrance to her home is not one of the openings toward the bottom of the pot in the shelter of the *Anubias* plants. No, it is the top of the pot at the top of the tank with

all the current from the filter spraybar. She floats, and flutters, and drifts in that current, all the while fighting to stay in the very center of the top of that pot. She shares it with the two smallest *petricola*, but they usually go in and out around the plants, so they don't bother her. She could go back to the shell bed. She seems to get along well with the other Multies, even Mr. Catfish. She occasionally joins the other pair for a little swimming and visits the shell bed. I am quite sure they would readily welcome her back. But she just loves that strawberry pot.

The *S. petricola* in my community tank are a hoot to watch. The cyps are shaping up to be beautiful, if not very intelligent, fish. You would think they would be the centerpieces of



Photo by Robert Sparks

the tank. But it is four quirky little Multies that give this community all of its character. Even if they never get it together to breed (and I am certainly not holding my breath), I think these tiny little fish will remain the lifeblood of their community for a long time to come.

Event Calendar:**Upcoming Events in Texas**

This is a new feature we hope to include periodically in future issues of the Lateral Line. All of the information has been obtained from other club's websites. I have not confirmed any dates and times. Please check with each club if you plan to attend any of their events. This list may not be complete so don't assume every event is included here. If anyone has any input or knows contacts from other cichlid clubs in Texas, please let me know. I would also like to include contact information for each club.

August:

Sunday August 6th:

Time: 11:00 am

Houston Aquarium Society Summer auction. To be held at the American Legion Post, 11702 Galveston Rd., Houston. For more information, visit www.HoustonAquariumSociety.org.

Saturday August 19th:

Texas Cichlid Association monthly meeting. Clarion DFW Airport South in Irving. Program to be announced.

Sunday August 20th:

Time: Noon

Hill Country Cichlid Club August meeting. At Dave's Rare Aquarium Fish, 5121 Crestway Drive Suite 300, San Antonio. Demonstration on how to build egg tumblers. All in attendance will receive a tumbler.

September:

Saturday, September 2nd:

Time: Noon

Hill Country Cichlid Club Fall Cichlid Day auction. Sponsored by Dave's Rare Aquarium Fish. To be held at Bracken United Methodist Church Fellowship Hall just north of San Antonio on I-35 (20377 FM 2252). Doors will open at 10:00 am. For more information, visit www.xdeleon.com/hccc/events.php

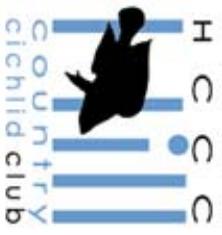
September 15-17th:

Texas Cichlid Association Fall Workshop and Auction. Confirmed speakers to date include Steve Lundblad and Dan Woodland. For more information, visit the TCA website at <http://home.flash.net/~tcichlid/>

October:

October 20-22nd:

The **Houston Aquarium Society** is hosting F.O.T.A.S. 2006. Speakers will include Heiko Bleher, Rusty Wessel and Jeff Senske. The 3 day event will be held at The Hotel Sofitel. For more information visit www.HoustonAquariumSociety.org and www.fotasonline.com. Information has not been updated on these sites, but visit as the event date gets closer for more information.



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