The Lateral Line

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Inside This Issue

***Haplochromis* sp. "blue back"**

Stomatepia pindu

Fish Tales and Other Nonsense pt. I

H C C C Hill country cichlid club

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Cover Photo:
Aulonocara koningsia
By Diane Tennison

BAP Report

Welcome to June which here locally in Texas has been a fairly wet month. It however did not slow down the spawning entries. Congratulations to Kenneth (Shelload) on his second entry into the program. It was a 1st of species spawn of *Metriaclima lombardoi*. Congrats Kenneth on the spawn of "snail eaters".

Marty and Melody contributed two more entries to their credit. Congratulations on the spawns of *Labidochromis caeruleus* (Yellow Labs) and the *Protomelas taeniolatus* (Red Empress).

Congratulations to Greg (GAS) on another "1st of species" entry with the spawning of *Xystichromis* sp. "Kyoga flameback". This fish stirred up quite an interest in members wanting a chance at the fry. Congrats again Greg on the spawning of another 1st of species.

Lastly, my *Orthochromis stormsi* finally produced some fry for me. The parents were fry I received from Greg (GAS) which gave him 5 extra points. Later on this month my *Stomatepia pindu* fry made the 60 day time period and I got them in the books. These are ESP species from Lake Barombi Mbo.

Standings on Page 15.

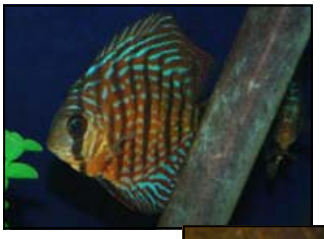
■ *Jim Beck*

HCCC Monthly Photo Contest

First Place
Donald Davis
Tropheus Lufubu

Second Place
Diane Tennison
Cynotilapia afra Lumbila

4-Way Tie for Third Place



Yvonne Beever

James Edmundson

Donald Davis

James Edmundson

Species Profile:

Haplochromis sp. "blue back"

Ok, let me preface this article by stating that there is almost NO information on these fish. The information I do have comes through personal communication. Any and all errors should be considered mine. As far as I know, there are only a few other people who have this species.

Common Name: None
Synonyms: None that I am aware of.
Distribution: Africa; Lake Victoria (most likely Kenya, but this hasn't been confirmed)
Size: Maximum size seems to be around 4"(10cm) for males with females staying slightly smaller.
Colouration: Base colouration of these cichlids is grey. Males have orange near the back of their dorsal and on the caudal fins. The top half of their back is yellow when dominant, otherwise sub males tend to have a blueish-grey back. The front part of the dorsal is blueish white colour (very hard to describe as it changes due to mood. The midpart of the dorsal is yellow, tending towards orange on the back. The amount of yellow varies between males. Generally these fish have a couple of blotches along the midbody that can turn into an almost solid line when the male is excited. They also have a small line above the midbody line but only approximately a third of the body length, in the middle of the back. The bottom half of the body stays grey unless the male is showing dominance or wanting to breed. The bottom becomes almost black with some vertical stripes going up from the bottom. These stripes get fainter as they travel up the body. Males have the typical yellow occelli with a clear edging around it. The anal fins are yellow. The pelvics are dark and can go completely black depending on mood. Females have a lot less colouring.

Photo by Lisa Boorman

They have the grey body with the blotches the males have, but it seems they tend to have a few more but smaller blotches along the mid body. They also have light yellow anal fins, and a yellowish colour to their caudal and pelvic fins. Females can get darker as well according to mood.

Diet: Probably an opportunistic detritus or awfuch feeder in the wild near shore. In the aquarium it takes pellets, flakes of all sorts and any other food given to the tank. It loves crushed snails.

Breeding: Mouthbrooder

Spawn size: Depends on size of the female, but in general can run from 5-40 fry. At 78° F (25°C) the fry should be released in approximately 18 days, much the same as most other Victorians.

pH: 7.2-8.6

Temperature:76-79°F (24-26°C)

Temperament: Mildly aggressive, but not overly so.

Tank Décor: They like rock work or caves but don't seem to require these for territory.

Additional info: They show a similarity to the old blue fire fins but are not the same. If a genus had to be assigned to this fish, they would most likely end up being *Xystichromis* or *Mbipia*.

I personally do not like the name given to this fish as it really doesn't show a blue back often. The thing that stands out about this Victorian cichlid is the fact that they have orange fins

Photo by Lisa Boorman

and not red which is so typical of the Victorian *mpibi*. I think this is what the name should be based on and not "blue back" which isn't descriptive of this fish at all. I'd like to offer another suggestion for a name for it; *Haplochromis* sp. "orange-fire fin", *Haplochromis* sp. "orange-fire blue back" or even just Hap. Sp. "orange-fire". This name reflects more on the features that make it additionally unique amongst the other fish from Lake Victoria.

I received these fish originally from Greg Steeves in Texas. He sent me a box full of Victorian 'goodies' (These were *Paralabi-*

dochromis sp. 'Rock Kribensis' "Mwanza Gulf", *Haplochromis* sp. 'blue back', *Pundamilia nyererei* "Python Island" and *Mbipia lutea* 'spotbar'). Most of the fry were quite small yet. These were very small and got placed into a small 10 gallon bare-bottom tank I had open. I was not expecting as many fish as I got and so ended up placing some fish into tanks that would be too small for them eventually. This tank was filtered by a sponge filter and had no heat. It stayed only at room temperature, so these fish can go lower than the recommended temperatures. I think the bottom tanks (where they were) only got to around 70° F.

I later found out that these fish were quite rare and that I better breed them as they should be distributed into the hobby. I had to wait until they got some size on them. I was going to place them into my 225 gallon tank with other assorted Malawians (and a few oddballs - one *Julidochromis marlieri* and a pair of firemouths). This took quite a while as it always seems that you never take as good a care with tanks that you just don't see often. They were given bi-weekly water changes and fed a good flake diet, with pellets added in.

When they reached approximately 2" in size, a few were placed in the main tank to see how they'd fare. I didn't want to put them all in and find out that the inhabitants of the 225g hated them and, as such, killed them. After seeing the ones I put in survive for a week in with their bigger tankmates, I moved the rest. I ended up with around 10 fish. It turned out that I seemed to have gotten a fairly even split between the sexes. However, since the fish were kept in the 10 for so long, a few did get stunted. Unfortunately it seems the small ones were the females. I kept an eye on the situation, and it appeared that the little ones had no problems in the main tank either.

They were fed the same food as everything else in that tank. A mix of regular flake, brine shrimp flake and earthworm flake. This tank also receives NLS pellets and some floating baby turtle pellets (someone I'm related to and I won't say who, bought these at auction and I wanted to at least use them). Crushed snails were fought over by all the fish in the 225 gallon. The tank at that time had a white sand bottom with pots, rocks and some shells. There was also a Jungle Vall plant in a pot in the tank as well. There was no direct lighting of this tank, all it got was ambient room lighting and light through a nearby window. This tank also got weekly-biweekly water changes depending on my schedule.

I had these fish for over a year before I saw a

female holding eggs. I suspect that's because the tank is fairly busy and they were just not big enough to spawn without interruption. I stripped the female pretty early for me knowing that these fish are rare. I tumbled them til they hatched and kept them for almost 2 months in a small container. When I decided to move them into a larger tank, I had a disaster. I discovered the next day that every one of the 20+ fry I moved had died in the new tank. I was devastated. I could not believe what happened. Again, the female held (but not til much later), but all I could rescue was 1 fry!!

Photo by Lisa Boorman

I couldn't believe how hard this was going to be. I ended up raising that fry with some electric yellow fry that were about the same size. Again…. disaster was waiting for me. Doing a routine water change on that tank I found that the now 2" fish had jammed himself in one of the slots of my sponge filter and had died there! I was beside myself now. I felt like I didn't deserve to keep such a rare fish.

It was about this time we decided to move. What an undertaking that is when you have as many tanks as we do! The week we started to move stuff, I discovered she was again holding. I left her alone for about 10 days and then stripped her. I got 11 fry. I was a little worried as we were now living in another house, and most of the fish were still at the old house. They seemed to do well. After we moved most of the tanks, I discovered I needed to move them so I could move the tank that their container was sitting on. I placed those fry in with some *P. nicholsi* fry I had and they ended up in a 10 gallon tank. After I'd put them together I realized I should have put them with something different. The fry look very similarly coloured at that size. I guess I'll just have to wait until they put on some size for me to tell them apart. When they get a bit bigger, I'll start offering some around.

■ *Lisa Boorman*

Species Profile:

Stomatepia pindu

I have been an aquarist on and off most of my adult life. Three years ago my interest turned to cichlids and this fascination has been growing ever since. I belong to the Hill Country Cichlid Club, an organization which fuels my need for information and also aids me in collecting cichlids. The HCCC started a conservation program for endangered species (ESP) which is another article in itself. Our club is only one of many that have initiated projects and awareness concerned with the plight of the family cichlidae. We use the IUCN Red List of Endangered Species as well as several cichlid experts to determine the status of the animals in the ESP program. I realized I already had two species that were on the list: *Neochromis* sp. "Madonna" (Kaufman, 1996) from Lake Nawampassa, Uganda and from Madagascar, *Katria katria* (Reinthal & Stiassny, 1997). One thing led to another and I now process nine threatened cichlid species. I purchased a colony of six attractive black *Stomatepia pindu* from Dave's Rare Aquarium Fish in San Antonio, Texas, in October 2006. So began my interest in the threatened species of Barombi Mbo.

Stomatepia pindu are endemic to Barombi Mbo, West Cameroon. There are several such crater lakes along the African Pacific coastline that were formed thousands of years ago by inactive volcanoes. The climate is tropical (25 - 27 C / 77 - 80.6 F). "Lake Barombi Mbo is a small lake only 2.5 kilometers wide, but 110 meters deep. As there is no large current to turn the water, only the top portion (40 meters) contains acceptable oxygen levels to harbor vertebrate life. Still here, a rich mostly endemic group of cichlids (and other fish) have evolved." (Steeves, 2003) S. pindu is listed as critically threatened on the IUCN red list (Critically Endangered (CR) (B1+2c)(Ref. 57073)). Human population growth, deforestation of the region and predation by other species are leading factors threatening its existence.

Photo by Dave Hansen

A normal coloration of solid black, *S. pindu* illuminates during spawning but will lighten considerably if stressed. Both sexes of *S. pindu* sport similar black body coloration and

this hinders identifying individual fish until maturity. The body is elongated with a pointed head and nose. Maximum size for males is to be 9.1 cm (3.5 in.). I appear to have two males, the larger being just over 3.5 inches and smaller one just under the 3.5 mark. Of the three remaining fish, two are approximately three inches and the third lies somewhere between three and 3.5 inches.

My *S. pindu* are housed in a 55 gallon tank along with five *Stomatepia mariae* (Holly, 1930) and a pair of *Limnochromis auritus* (Boulenger, 1901). The water temperature is maintained at 80 degrees F. The local water here is hard and very suitable for these fish. The tank has a small gravel base with four rocks and one live plant, Aponogeton fenestralis "West Coast Madagascan Lace". Water changes of 20% every week are made and filters inspected and cleaned as required.

The *S. pindu* are fed a mixture of HBH® Seafood Lovers and HBH® Graze Vegetable flake. This diet helps to fulfill their piscivorous protein requirements. Feeding procedures differ between hobbyists; we use one which fits our daily routine. I feed once a day, late at night, 10 PM and wait for 30 minutes before turning off tank lights, and then another 15 minutes before room lights are turned off. (I need to get a timer). I also do not alter my feedings before, during or after spawning. They are a mouth brooding species and unfortunately I have not been privileged to observe their spawning. The pair just seems to stop when they feel comfortable and go about their business, the female dropping eggs on the gravel followed by the male circling in to fertilize. As this species of fish is mouth brooder, the female then picks up the eggs for incubation (McKinney, 2003). I only realize that spawning has taken place, when I have observed the female holding the next day. The male was still in breeding dress, a gleaming shiny black.

Of the information I have gathered, they are difficult to breed. It is my experience that the difficulty is in trying to preserve the fry. On the first spawning, I attempted to remove the female after two days to a safer fry tank. I removed all the rocks and plants from the breeding tank during which time the fish were very excitable and in a nervous frenzy. Their color also faded drastically. After netting female, she spit her eggs. I attempted to tumble unsuccessfully. All six perished within 24 hours.

I was more prepared for the next spawning. I allowed the brooding female to hold for 16 days before attempting to move her. I separated a portion of their tank into a fry proof area. I took my time removing the ornaments and allowed these nervous fish to calm down. The same result occurred upon netting the female. She spit out nine fry. This time they were placed conveniently next door and the female was returned to the colony. They are growing very fast even outgrowing some of my Malawians. The fry are very black like their parents with one exception: Young *S. pindu* exhibit a tilapia spot on their dorsal that vanishes upon adulthood (Steeves, 2003).

Because the second spawn was successful, I again waited 16 days on the third spawning before going through the ritual of removing the female. The identical result of spitting the fry took place again upon netting. A small portion of egg sack was still visible on the fry. This time I placed her and the fry in the fry tank. Within a short time she had picked up all her fry. She held for another five days then began releasing a few at a time. All were released in

Photo by Dave Hansen

three days. Again, there were nine fry from this successful spawning. I kept her in the fry tank for an additional three days to regain her stamina before returning to colony. Both groups of fry are doing great and eating the same flake foods as parents only it is finely crushed.

S. Pindu tolerates other species in the tank and show some aggressiveness toward co-specs which does intensify during spawning. The sub-dominant male did take a beating but had areas of seclusion for safety. Once spawning was complete, the dominant male's aggression was reduced. The subdominant male healed quickly and was in full health again. If you wish to keep this fish, plan ahead. A large tank with plenty of places for refuge will acceptably house this species. *S. pindu* requires a high protein diet. If one is fortunate enough to have a spawn, careful removal of the female is necessary.

Unlike the Peacocks, Mbuna and Lake Victoria cichlids, with their brilliant coloration, *Stomatepia pindu* is still a very attractive fish sporting its solid black coloration and sleek body design. Another factor in my selection of this species is that it is endangered. All in all after the trial and error, *Stomatepia pindu* is a very nice addition to my hobby and will be to yours as well.

References and Acknowledgements:

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- Steeves, Greg. (2003) Insight on Barombi Mbo, Cameroon -Originally published in The Lateral Line, the official publication of the Hill Country Cichlid Club
- IUCN Red List of Endangered Species - Critically Endangered (CR) (B1+2c)(Ref. 57073) http://www.iucnredlist.org/search/details.php/20866/all
- Photography by Dave Hansen

■ *Jim Beck*

Member article:

Fish Tales and Other Nonsense Part I

A wonderful aspect to the aquarium hobby is that it enables one to express some individuality in the species we keep and the way we do things. Although there are constant basics such as ensuring dechlor is used when dealing with a municipal water supply, the need to provide "new" water, filtration etc, how we use our dechlor, the frequency and volume of water changes and type of filtration we use, all makes us individuals in the fish keeping world. The organized hobby is a fantastic avenue for information sharing, be it a local club, an internet group or discussion forum, or a trip to shoot the breeze at your neighborhood fish store. There are friendly rivalries in the fish keeping world as well. Even though our club consists mostly of cichlid keepers, small friendly inter-faction digs are common. I have a friend who refers to my Lake Victoria cichlids as "mud fish". I've heard West Africans called "colorless brown fish", and then there are the big South and Central America keepers who refer to all other cichlids as "feeders"! About the only time you will get a group of cichlid people to show any kind of cohesiveness is when we get around guppy, betta, or killi people. When this event occurs it's like a friendly meeting of the bloods and crips.

Photo by Dave Hansen

Over the course of my many years in the hobby, I have done some rather stupid things. This is part of my personality makeup and even if I wasn't an aquarist, I'm certain that this behavior trait would remain intact. My only saving grace, I have found, is that pretty much everyone who has kept fish for any amount of time at all, has a tale to churn that involves two common factors; water and stupidity. I'll attempt to convey to you a few of these accounts.

Many years ago, when Malawian cichlids had my attention, I had a 100 gallon tank of *Labeotropheus fuelliborni* in my living room. The tank included a lot of rockwork that looked great, but seriously hampered any efforts at catching holding females to save the fry. These mbuna didn't so much eat their own young, but catching them so that my fish friends could try them in their tanks was very daunting. Each time they seen me approaching the tank with a net, they would hide among the rocks and the aquarium would look empty. I tried hiding the net behind a can of

food but I wasn't quick enough to plunge it into the water before they would disappear. After some serious brain ache trying to figure out how to harvest the young mbuna or how to snag a packing female, I came up with an ingenious plan. I cut the end off of a plastic two liter pop bottle and poked a couple holes at the

Photo by Greg Steeves

top opening. I then hooked fishing line to this and attached it to the line on my fishing pole. I had my couch on the other side of the room facing this tank and here is where I sat patiently staring into the tank with my fishing pole in hand. The pop bottle was resting on the tank bottom between two rocks. I was diligently waiting for fry, or better yet, a big holding female to swim in and check out the new cave. Not wanting to disturb the fish, I was very still and ready to pull the line and hit the reel as soon as I had a taker. Suddenly I heard my front door open; I heard footsteps and the sound of my refrigerator's door. I heard the distinctive resonance of someone helping themselves to my beer and the "swoosh" of the twist off cap. It was two of my friends who were in the neighborhood and stopped by to say hello. They each walked in my living room, sat on the couch on either side of me. Watched the tank to try and figure out what I was doing, finished their beers, got up and left. They did this all without saying a single word. I guess they knew I was a little off and figured this was "normal" for me. A couple days later I started getting comments from other people concerning the event. Statements like "he likes fishing but doesn't like the outdoors", or "get any bites Saturday?" All in all it must have looked pretty ridiculous and, as I can recall, the bottle was too heavy to lift quickly enough for this otherwise great plan to work.

Then there is my buddy Bob. Bob is an innovator when it comes to keeping cichlids. He is a "MacGyver" type person that always has a neat invention or great idea. In addition to being an advanced hobbyist, Bob has worked in some capacity, most of his life, in the retail pet trade. This one afternoon, while working at his store, a lady and her

child walked in and made their way to the large vat of feeder goldfish. This tank contained thousands of fish and was marked "feeders, 10 cents each or $1.00 a dozen". The lady explained that her daughter wanted a simple goldfish for her daughters bowl. Of course the life expectancy of such a setup is very short but there was no reasoning with the lady to get her to get an aquarium and set it up properly before buying a fish.. He gives in and they walk to the vat where he get ready to dip the net is to get the kid a goldfish. The child points to the tank and informs Bob that she wants THAT one. You can imagine the daunting task trying to get one particular fish out of a group of a thousand! He snagged another fish just to hear the kid say "no no, I want THAT orange and white one". Being the good sport he is, he stuck with it and finally caught a fish that seemed to be the one the kid was after. Together, the three of them walked to the register where he could ring the purchase in. A couple clicks of the register keys and he politely informs the lady that her bill is $4.99. She is taken back and tells him that the sign says they are a dime a piece. He informs her that if he has to catch a certain fish from all that are in there, they evolve from feeders to fancy goldfish and her bill is $4.99. That's classic Bob!

One more short Bob adventure (there are enough to fill a book). One afternoon while working at his shop, two young pretty college girls stop by to look at the fish. He's busy doing maintenance but notices their captivation with the school of piranha in a display tank. He hears comments from the girls about the fish being so dangerous and blood thirsty. Not able to let this discussion go on without becoming involved, Bob explains to the girls that the piranha's aggressive reputation is more fable than fact. He explains that the fish is from the same family as the neon tetra and continues on trying to look knowledgeable and impressive in front of the students. They challenge his views with references to nature

shows that have schools of piranha stripping a large fish to bones in no time at all. Bob decides to prove to them how docile these fish really are and nets a couple from the tank. He puts them in a bucket on the floor and kneels down beside it informing the girls there is nothing to be concerned about as he plunges his hand into the bucket with the fish. Well, Bob being Bob, the worse possible scenario that could happen in any given circumstance usually does. One of the fish immediately ran

at his hand and tears into his finger. He jerks his hand back only to find the tip of his finger severely severed and blood gushing out of it everywhere. Unable to stop the bleeding, he is rushed to emergency where they glue his finger (the stitches wouldn't stay in) back together. For the next couple weeks, he had to wear a splint on his finger to keep it from opening back up. Which digit was it? Of course, it was his middle finger! He should have done all this before the lady and her kid walked in wanting the orange and white goldfish!

Photo by Greg Steeves

For us lucky folks living down here in the hill country of Texas, we are very fortunate to have a resource readily at our disposal that is rare and sought after elsewhere. I'm talking of course about holey rock. Show pieces are common at fish auctions here attracting many bids. One thing that people aren't aware of is the potential for danger each piece brings. Our cichlids love holey rock because it is basically a chunk of lime stone with holes throughout. These holes were created by thousands of years of water flow. The fish make good use of the holes for territory and even hiding their fry. The rock looks great in an aquarium. What others don't know, that we here have become aware of, is that other creatures love the holes in holey rock as well. At a TCA convention a couple years ago, one large piece was picked up from the floor and placed on a table so all could view it. When it was set down a spider crawled from one of the holes. The people sitting at the front table instantly cleared the area. The spider was supposedly a black widow but I myself didn't actually see it and it was never captured or killed. The way people scrambled, I would say there is a good possibility that it was! On two different occasions at other auctions, I have seen scorpions crawl from the crevices of holey rock. The effect generated was similar to the spider scene.

I have called this article Part 1 because there are many other tales to tell. As long as we keep fish there will be stupid things that happen to us along the way. It is both the curse and allure of the aquarist. Take heed in knowing you are not the only one to have situations occur, sit back and have a laugh then share your stupidity with the world.

■ *Greg Steeves*

Event Calendar:

Upcoming Events in Texas

August

August 5th
Time: Noon
Hill Country Cichlid Club—Monthly meeting at Dave's Rare Aquarium Fish in San Antonio.

August 5th
Time: TBA
Houston Aquarium Society—Gulf Coast Collection Trip. Visit www.houstonaquariumsociety.org for more information.

August 18th
Time: TBA
Texas Cichlid Association—Regular monthly meetings. Details on website as soon as they become available.

September

September 7-9th
Hill Country Cichlid Club— F.O.T.A.S. 2007 hosted by the HCCC. Speakers, banquet, show and auction.

Current BAP Standings

Name	YTD
Jim	130
Greg W.	85
Greg S.	85
Diane	55
Marty	50
Doc	50
Dave H.	50
Kenneth	45
Christy	35

Current Standings (cont)

Name	YTD
Lisa Bo.	30
Paul	30
Duc	25
Eric	25
Lisa Bl.	20
Robert	20
Pat	15
Nick	5

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