

The Lateral Line

Volume 2, Issue 32

May—June 2008



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Prognathochromis sp. "silver stiletto"

Lake Victoria Cichlids

Metriaclima estherae





June 18, 2008

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Cover Photo:

*Paralabidochromis
chromogynus*

By Lee Ann Steeves

BAP Report

The BAP for May has started to pickup and not only with the number of spawns but with the "First of Species" and "First Entries". There has been an increase in the number new "fish rooms" and "man made ponds". This should make for a great BAP year.

Nick (Nick A) has updated his garage into a work of art. This fish room has great arrangement and numerous displays. I will definitely make the trip for the grand opening. Nick's entry of *Aulonocara* sp. "Lwanda" is a 1st of species. Another entry was in the Cyno group, one of Nicks favorite species, was the *Cynotilapia afra* "Nkhata Bay". Soon to follow was the *Cyno afra* "Jalo Reef". But wait, still more to follow. Soon Nick entered a 1st of species with the *Cynotilapia* sp "Elongatus Taiwan". Another 1st of species was the *Metriaclima* sp. "Zebra Long Pelvic". It appears that your hard work is starting to produce great results. Congratulations on the 5 entries and on the 1st of species.

May also produced another first with the "First Entry" in the BAP. Congratulations go out to Ed (Cichliot) for the *Julidochromis transcriptus* spawning. Ed made both the fry and parents available which would be a great starter kit for any member looking to add to their fish room. Congrats Ed and welcome to the club.

A member who has turned his back yard into several "swimming pool ponds" is Dan (Dswchacht). While Dan is waiting on the ponds to produce, his fish room gave him an entry with a "C" class *Ancistrus* species. Dan also made the parents and fry available to members. Congrats Dan.

Congratulations to JB (jbledlover) on his first entry into the BAP with the species *Pundamilia nyererei* "Python Island". You can tell that JB enjoys his hobby, by the large tank display inside his house and a two-car garage full of tanks and fish and fry. Hopefully with a little more prodding we can get him to submit some more entries. I myself am waiting on the "Red Empress" fry to be available. Congrats JB and to the others for making May a great BAP month.

BAP standings on page 14

■ *Jim Beck*

Species Profile:***Prognathochromis* sp. "silver stiletto"**

The *Prognathochromis* genus is based on Pellegrin's 1904 description of *Paratilapia prognatha*. Closely related to the *Harpagochromis* lineage, *Prognathochromis* species have a slender body. The snout is pointed with a noticeable premaxilla protuberance. *Prognathochromis* are slender carnivores (most are piscavores) with large, slightly down turned mouths. The lower jaw extends past the upper giving the head a pointed "arrow" shape. When viewing the pro-



Photo by Dave Hansen

file, the eye socket of *Prognathochromis* species is relatively even with the forehead slope. Teeth in the outer rows of larger fish (over 9cm) are stout and curved.

The subgenus *Tridontochromis* is differentiated by a small adult size (9.5-12cm) and protrusible jaws. As the name implies, *Tridontochromis*' main characteristic is the presence of tricuspid teeth in the outer row of both jaws. The pharyngeal bone contains fine compressed teeth.

The other subgenus *Prognathochromis* usually

reach a large adult size (14-23cm) except three species (10cm). Dentition consists of unicuspid teeth in adult individuals lining the outer row on both jaws. The eye protrudes slightly above the cranial slope. Internally, the pharyngeal bone is covered with noticeably more coarse teeth as compared with *Tridontochromis* species.

Prognathochromis sp. "silver stiletto" is not from Lake Victoria proper but rather Lake Nawampassa in the Kyoga Basin, located north of the great lake in Uganda. The introduction and subsequent reign of the Nile perch (*Lates niloticus*) in Lake Victoria has had a decimating impact on many cichlid species. Among the hardest hit were the piscavores including members of the *Prognathochromis* genus. Fortunately, many of the cichlid lineages of Lake Victoria have closely related representatives in surrounding waters.

In its natural habitat, *Prognathochromis* sp. "silver stiletto" inhabits areas of dense vegetation, especially reed laden areas when it "hangs" motionless amongst the plants (Kaufman, 2008). This feeding strategy of ambush predation is enhanced by the fish's silver coloration allowing the animal to appear nearly invisible amongst the gleaming sunlight. When an unsuspecting fish comes within range, *Prognathochromis* sp. "silver stiletto" darts out with lightening quickness. Small fish are devoured in a single strike while larger prey are attacked side on and severed in two pieces. Feeding almost exclusively on other

fish, *Prognathochromis* sp. "silver stiletto" will occasionally take insects and soft invertebrates.

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Photo by Lee Ann Steeves

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In Lake Nawampassa, *Prognathochromis* sp. "silver stiletto" attains a length of 9cm (Kaufman, 2008) but in captivity, 14cm is not uncommon. At maturity, females are slightly smaller than their male counterparts. The body

is laterally compressed and a foil-like silver coloration. The dorsal is powder blue in mature males and hyaline on females. The caudal fin is colorless with slight tinges of red between the fin rays. The anal fin has red hues, a slight blue base and is adorned with a small number of ocelli. Among males, the first hard ray of the pelvic fin is black while the rest of the appendage is clear. These fins as well as the pectoral fins of both sexes are colorless. There is an eye bar that extends from the corner of the mouth, up the cheek and through the eye. The large mouth is down turned and full of unicuspid teeth spaced in 3-4 rows. The lower lip is much more pronounced than the upper with a lobed extension at the center portion. The forehead is angled at 45° with a strong premaxilla but little indentation where the appendage begins.

Very limited spawning details are available. This species is a maternal mouth brooder with seemingly small brood sizes of between 8-20 larvae. Even with the onset of mating, male do not establish a defined territory. *Prognathochromis* sp. "silver stiletto" spawns in the open over a sandy substrate with no obvious excavation of a spawning pit. The female will incubate eggs for 18 days at 27°C. The brood period can be extended with cooler temperatures

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and hastened at higher. Females will continue brood care for two weeks post release. The male, apart from the act of spawning, exhibits no parental care.

This is a rather undemanding resident in the aquarium providing some obvious and basic husbandry techniques are employed. As an open water hunter, it is not necessary to arrange the aquaria with an abundance of rockwork or other space consuming décor. Many of the Vallisneria species can be aqua-scaped into clumps with



Photo by Dave Hansen

some open spaces. I have found that this cichlid looks best when housed with reed-like plants on each end of the aquarium and an open area in the center. A substrate consisting of sand works nicely for this fish. *Prognathochromis* sp. "silver stiletto" does well when maintained in a species only arrangement however; it is possible to add select tank mates. Despite being a piscivore, this cichlid is relatively docile and easily bullied by more boisterous species. One must ensure that tank mates are large enough to avoid being eaten. Two cichlids that work well with *Prognathochromis* sp. "silver stiletto" are *Haplochromis* sp. "ruby" and *Yssichromis* sp. "blue tipped". Some of the oral shellers such as *Ptyochromis* sp. "salmon" might also work well.

I recommend avoiding more active fish such as *Pundamilia* or *Neochromis* species. There are some *Synodontis* that make excellent tank mates as well. When adding *Synodontis* ensure there is cover for these catfish and stay away from the "busy" Tanganyikan species such as *S. multipunctatus* and *S. lucipinnis*. *Synodontis flavitaeniatus* and *S. nigrata* are good choices to diversify the aquarium.

Feeding presents no problem at all. All foods are readily taken however, to maintain in good condition, one must keep in mind the fish's carnivorous nature. High protein foods work best. I supplement feedings of flake with live *Gambusia affinis*. Many people do not advocate the use of live fish as a food source. In this case, ample brine shrimp (*Artemia* sp.) or red and black worms can be supplemented.

Never overly numerous in Lake Nawampassa, *Prognathochromis* sp. "silver stiletto" still appears regularly in native catches (Kaufman, 2008). In the cichlid hobby, this is an extremely rare cichlid. It is not the easiest fish to induce to spawning which evidently, has led to fewer and fewer aquarists working with this species. What a shame it would be to lose this sparkling gem in the hobby.

■ Greg Steeves

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From Seattle to Uganda via St. Louis: Seeking and Finding Lake Victoria Cichlids

April 26, 2008

I'm writing this article from my hotel room in Entebbe, Uganda, just a hundred yards from Lake Victoria, Africa's biggest lake and home to hundreds of species of cichlids. I am here on a two-week business trip, which luckily included a weekend available to look for fish. This time I decided to travel a hundred miles north of Lake Victoria to visit some of the satellite lakes of its basin, rather than visit the Lake itself. I'll tell you why in a few paragraphs, but first let me tell you about my last short trip to Lake Victoria, about six weeks ago.

It was also a business trip, but this time I stayed in Uganda's capital Kampala to launch a new project to develop drought-tolerant corn varieties for African farmers. On my last day in the country, a Sunday, I decided to hire a car and head down to Lake Victoria to look for some of its famous cichlids. The lake is about 240 miles long and 190 miles wide and is situated at the border between Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania. It contains an estimated 600 species of cichlids, most of which were originally classified in the *Haplochromis* genus but later were split into several genera, including *Harpagochromis*, *Lipochromis*, *Astatotilapia*, and *Pundamilia*. Fifty years ago there were an estimated one thousand species in the lake, but some 200 of these are thought to have been

extirpated by the Nile perch, which feeds on cichlids and can grow to six feet in length. The Nile Perch was introduced into the Lake in the 1950s for commercial fishing purposes and multiplied quickly over the next 30 years. Other cichlid species may have been wiped



Photo by Lawrence Kent

out as the lake's water quality deteriorated due to contamination by sediment runoff from its largely deforested banks. The water along the shoreline is pretty muddy.

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I realized the dip net I brought along would be useless to capture fish in such murkiness. I also was reluctant to wade into the lake because of the reported presence of parasitic worms that cause a nasty disease called schistosomiasis, or bilharzia. Instead I negotiated with some boys to take me out in their wooden canoe to try our luck with the hooks, worms, and line they'd tied to empty water bottles that served as both rods and reels. We saw some beautiful birds, but caught nothing. After an hour we returned to land and made further inquiries of the locals, showing them pictures of the *haplochromines* in my Barrons book "Lake Victoria Basin Cichlids" (by Mark Smith) to make ourselves clear. They told me I might find fishermen who could help me in the nearby town of Bugonga. So I went to Bugonga, showed the book around, and was quickly invited to sit in a larger canoe. Two locals joined me and paddled hard until we'd traveled about a mile into the lake. There they located a home-made buoy that had a submersed jerry can filled with water tied to it. They pulled the can up and then pulled out about a dozen *haplochromine* cichlids. They'd been storing them there, live, for later use as bait to catch...Nile perch. These cichlids were dark blue, relatively deep bodied, some with red fins, some with barring - not spectacular, but pretty handsome. It is extremely hard to identify Victorian cichlids to the species level because there are so many of them. Many of the species are undescribed, and those that are described are often distinguished by bone and teeth structures that are hard to see outside of a dissection laboratory. But most of these guys looked like the *Paralabidochromis*

sp. "Rock Kribensis" pictured on page 44 of the Barrons book. I left some money with the fishermen on the shore and asked them if they could round up a few more cichlids for me while I headed off to Mbamba island for a few hours to visit the chimpanzee sanctuary there.

When I returned to Bugonga later that afternoon, they had a couple dozen *haplochromi-*



Photo by Lawrence Kent

nes to show me. Most seemed to be Rock Kribensis, but there may also have been some *Xystichromis*, *Guarochromis*, or *Orthochromis* species. I was able to bring a half dozen juveniles home, giving five to my friend Cory in St. Louis and saving one for my living room tank in Seattle. It'll be inter-

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esting to see how they color up as they grow. I'm counting on Cory to breed them and report back on how things develop, maybe in an article in about ten months?



Photo by Lawrence Kent

Well, that trip was fun, but I wanted to do better on this second visit. After reading the Barrons book more carefully I'd realized that I'd be more likely to find many of the more spectacularly colored Lake Victoria Basin cichlids in the nearby satellite lakes rather than in the Lake itself. I emailed a Ugandan travel agent and told him I wanted to visit Lake Nawampasa over the weekend, because this tiny lake seemed to be mentioned the most frequently in the Barrons book. The agent booked me an old Land Cruiser and a room in a small inn in the small town of Pallisa, about five hours northeast of Kampala.

Upon arrival, my Ugandan driver (named

Sanyo) and I started asking around to get directions to Lake Nawampasa, which the travel agent had said was just 20 miles from Pallisa. But nobody seemed to have heard of Lake Nawampasa. Luckily we bumped into an outgoing young Ugandan from the region who convinced us to visit an alternative lake nearby that he assured us was filled with "nkedge" - the local name for all small cichlids. We asked him to join us, and George Ouze jumped into our car and guided us another 15 miles down a dirt road past traditional mud huts and papyrus swamps to a small, reed-lined lake. He called it "Daraja," but we later learned it's more formally known as Gigati.

We agreed to pay some locals a fee of 20,000 Ugandan shillings (about \$13) to help us pull some fish from their lake so we could photograph them. A few minutes later, four men dragged my minnow seine a few yards off shore and caught dozens of juvenile cichlids. Many of these were tilapia (probably zilli). Others were *haplochromines*, showing

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eggspots on their anal fins and hints of color, but too young to be identified. Just one was canary yellow with bright blue lips and a red and blue dorsal fin - the Dwarf Victorian Mouthbrooder, *Pseudocrenilabrus multicolor*



Photos by Lawrence Kent

victoriae. We soon realized that to see more color we'd need to find adult fish, not just juveniles, so we hopped into one of the locals' leaky canoes and headed out through the reeds into the lake.

We were intercepted on our way by another canoe coming in, its driver holding his paddle in one hand and a plastic bowl filled with cichlids in the other - he'd quickly caught them for us once he realized what we were after. I was excited by the diverse set of colorful fish in his bowl, and realized that this trip was not going to disappoint! Although I couldn't be sure of my identifications, there seemed to be some *Xystichromis* sp. "Kyoga Flameback" which is also (perhaps more descriptively) known as "Nawampasa All Red." It is a gorgeous four-inch fish with red fins and splashes of bright red covering its head, gill covers, and back.

Also in the bowl were some *Haplochromis* sp. "Ruby," which were even more beautiful, with red fins, sky blue lips, and a yellow stripe separating an orange-red back from turquoise flanks. The local fisherman explained that he'd caught these fish on hook and line using worms for bait.

Once we'd penetrated the reeds in our canoe, we paddled over to a series of other canoes, each occupied by a pair of small boys fishing



for "nkedge" using primitive fishing poles. As we pulled alongside these canoes, we were able to see their floors were littered with dozens of freshly caught, dead and dying cichlids, many of them spectacularly colored. The lo-

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cals explained that they ate these little fish, almost all of them less than 4 inches in length, boiled or grilled and mixed with sauce made from "G-nuts" (groundnuts or peanuts). It was



Photos by Lawrence Kent

the kids' job to catch them, one at a time, and they could catch twenty an hour. We rescued the most beautiful and interesting fish that were still alive from the boys' boats and put them in our bucket to bring back to shore to take photographs and to attempt to identify them.

The *Astatotilapia latifasciata* (Zebra Obliquidens) were the easiest to i.d. because of their distinct thick black barring on their yellow flanks and rosy cheeks. The ones with the classic haplochromine shape, dark blue bodies, and super red dorsal, anal, and broad caudal fins were probably *Astatotilapia nubila*. The big-mouthed six-inch predator was shaped like the *Harpogochromis mentatus* in the Barrons book and probably belonged to that genus. I later showed a photograph of this fish to Greg Steeves, the Regional Coordinator for the

American Cichlid Association's Conservation Priority List for Lake Victoria. Greg noted the fish's golden color said that it was most likely *Harpogochromis* sp. "Golden Duck." Greg is good with colors. I showed him a photo of another unidentified purple and yellow fish we caught that day. He told me it might be *Haplochromis* sp. "purple yellow"!

The five-inch laterally-compressed *Pyxichromis orthostoma* seemed relatively easy to identify because of its distinct Alto-lamprologus calvus-like body shape and cav-



ernous upturned mouth. According to Barrons, this species is an ambush predator that roams freely through the plants and open,

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sandy areas. At one point it was considered extinct.



Photo by Lawrence Kent

Another species we found among the boys' catch appeared to be *Lipochromis* sp. "Parvidens shovelmouth," which is distinguishable because of its protruding mouth and concave forehead. Barrons says that this fish is paedophorous, consuming baby fish and embryos by forcibly sucking them from the mouths of brooding *haplochromines*. Later, Greg Steeves, who should be considered a more expert reviewer, said he thought the fish might actually be a new *Pyxichromis* species, because of its unusual color - bright turquoise flanks and dusky purple fins. He suggested we

consider giving it the working name of *Pyxichromis* sp. "Gigati", after the little lake in which it was found. Yes, these fish are unfamiliar and hard for a novice like me to identify.

We spent about four hours at that lake, before handing out about \$30 in tips to the dozen or so locals who helped us. We drove back to Pallisa, covered in mud, with a half dozen unidentifiable juvenile fish. The inn didn't have electricity or even any coffee, but it had good mosquito nets, and I slept well after looking at the hundred or so new photos of fish stored in my digital camera.

The next morning Sanyo, George and I took off at 6:30 a.m., determined to find someone who could help us find Lake Nawampasa, or at least someone who'd heard of it. It turned out to be an incredible search, full of twists and turns, and I didn't get back to Entebbe until 10:30 that night, sunburned and filthy. I'll tell that part of the story another day. It's time to go to bed. God bless you and your fish.

■ Lawrence Kent

Part II on next issue.

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Species Profile:***Metriaclima estherae***

The *Metriaclima estherae* is a beautiful cichlid that is moderately aggressive. It is endemic to Lake Malawi in Eastern Africa. Named after the late exporter Stuart Grant's wife Esther, it has a life span of 10 years.

The most colorful of these fish are found near Minos Reef. In the wild the male appears to be blue or a whitish-pink while the female is colored deep orange or even red. It is typically found that in captivity the male tend to be orange while the females are not as vibrant, looking lighter than the male. The male is usually a little larger than the female as well. These fish can reach up to 5 inches (12.5 cm) in length.

Metriaclima estherae is a maternal mouth brooder (females carry their eggs in an appendage of the mouth called the buccal cavity) as are all Lake Malawi mbuna cichlids. Gestation time for this brood is usually 21 days give or take a few days depending on temperature. A brood of 20-35 is an average size and mom will take care of her brood for another two weeks once she releases them. If you are planning on breeding or keeping these fish, 1 male is recommended for 3-5 females. Mothers should be removed from the community tank when brooding is noticed. It is good practice to remove only after you are sure she has been holding for at least 4 days to ensure she will not prematurely spit her larvae. Mom should be left with her young for at least

the first week so that she may eat before being returned to the community tank where she is likely to spawn again. She may eat while carrying if she is experienced, holding several previous broods. She will need time to eat and regain strength after three weeks of not eating. During the process of holding her young, mom will most likely not eat.



Photo by Evan Bowers

These cichlids are omnivores. In our aquariums, they will eat just about anything. They love algae as well as a good flake food or pellet. It is strongly recommended to feed these cichlids a green vegetable 1-2 times a week. This can consist of zucchini slices, romaine lettuce or even squished fresh peas. Be careful to stay away from greens low in nutrients such as iceberg lettuce or celery. *M. estherae* also need their daily amounts of protein which will come from a good flake or pellet. Two to three feedings a day is recommended. One should take special care in not over feeding

these fish or giving them high protein sources such as beef heart or live food on a regular basis. Their intestines are very long and curvy and digestion can slow down considerably. In the fish world it is referred to as the "bloat" or "Malawi bloat". This disease is one of the most common issues with African cichlids and can be fatal. It is not contagious however more than one fish can get sick from it at a time in the same aquarium.

The aquarium should be of adequate size for these little beauts. A Thirty gallon aquarium is the minimal recommended size for 3-5 *Metriaclima estherae*. The temperature should be between 75F and 80F. For infantile juvies, the temp should be between 78F and 82f degrees. Ammonia and nitrites should always be at 0 ppm (parts per million) and nitrates should always be at their lowest, usually around 10-15. The value of pH should be in the rage of 7.6-8.6.

There should be lots of hiding areas in the aquarium whether it be caves, plants, rocks or even pvc piping. A 25-33 percent water change should be done weekly. Keep filters clear of debris and change HOB (hang on back) filter media at least once every 4-6 weeks. Keep a 4 inch square of the old filter media (not rinsed out) to place with the new filter media to ensure safe biosphere. This is good practice for all aquarium species.

Most other moderately aggressive Malawian cichlid can be placed in the aquarium with *Metriaclima estherae* that are of equal size.

Whatever African cichlids you choose for your tank should be eating the same food, have the same aggression level, and require the same water values. Some cichlids that do well with the *Metriaclima estherae* are *Pseudotropheus kenyi*, *Melanochromis johanni*, *Labidochromis caeruleus* (yellow lab), *Pseudotropheus crabro* (bumble bee), *Melanochromis cyaneorhabdos* (Mainganos), *Aulonochromis*



Photo by Evan Bowers

cara species (Peacocks), *Scianochromis ahli* (Blue Ahli), *Pseudotropheus socolofi*, and the *Pseudotropheus* sp. "ice blue" (Red Top Ice Blue). These are all great fish to start your aquarium out with, they all can hold their own aggression wise, and they all basically eat the same thing. These Malawian cichlids, coupled with *Metriaclima estherae*, will display a myriad of coloration rivaling any salt water reef!

■ Rohnda Pagan

Event Calendar:**Upcoming Events in Texas****June**

June 21th

Texas Cichlid Association— regular monthly meeting. Location TBA.

June 29th

Hill Country Cichlid Club— Monthly meeting at Dave's Rare Aquarium Fish in San Antonio. For directions visit www.davesfish.com

July

July 17-20th

ACA 2008 Convention in Atlanta Georgia. Check out the ACA 2008 website for more details. www.aca2008.com

July 20th

Houston Aquarium Society— Summer Live

Fish Auction. American Legion Post #490. Visit www.houstonaquariumsociety.org for more information.

August

August 30th

Hill Country Cichlid Club— Cichlid Day auction. Location and time TBD. Visit www.hillcountrycichlidclub.com for details as they become available.

September

Sept. 26- 28th

Federation of Texas Aquarium Societies— 2008 Annual Convention, 25th Anniversary. Hosted by the Texas Cichlid Association in Irving Texas. Visit www.texascichlid.org for more information.

2008 BAP Standings

Name	YTD
Nick	205
Dan	135
Pat	70
Greg	45
Jerry	25
Duc	25
Evan	20

2008 BAP Standings cont.

Name	YTD
Robert T	20
Robert D	15
Lisa	15
JB	15
Ed	15
Jim B	5

National event:

ACA Convention 2008



This year's American Cichlid Association convention will be hosted by the Atlanta Area Aquarium Association. For more information visit www.aca2008.com or www.atlantaaquarium.com/



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