

# The Lateral Line

Volume 1, Issue 6

November 1, 2004



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# BAP Report

Our first year of the Breeder Award Program finished on October 31st. In the end, Charles gave Greg a good run but fell just shy.

So, pending legal action and a recount, **Greg Steeves wins our first ever Breeder of the Year award.** Personally I can't think of anyone more deserving. Greg has a real nice setup and anyone wishing to see what it looks like can visit: [www.xdeleon.com/hccc/fishrooms/greg.php](http://www.xdeleon.com/hccc/fishrooms/greg.php).

Charles, congratulations on your point totals as well. Hopefully he will submit his fishroom so we can add it to our site.

For the rest of us, it's now a new year and we are all tied for first place in the Breeder of the Year running. Lets keep those fish spawning and don't forget to submit your entries.

## Current Standings

Name	Score	Pending
Greg	320	85
Charles	290	
Robert	135	20
Duc	105	25
Paul	105	
Dave H.	90	15
Lisa	60	20
Blair	55	80
Brian	40	
Kris	25	
Jeff		60
JJ		30

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### Upcoming Events:

- Houston Aquarium Society auction Nov. 21st.
- HCCC Christmas Party Dec. 5th.

Cover Photo:  
Xystichromis sp.  
"flameback".  
by Spencer Jack

## Newbie-Eye View of an Auction

— by Diane Tennison

Never turn your back on an auction chairman! Before you know it, you will be in charge of something. That's how I got involved in my first club auction. As a new Cichlid hobbyist - I was excited about my first ever auction. I offered to help in any way. I thought that I would be a good candidate to take orders - I never imagined that I might be in a position to give them!

We were at our monthly club meeting, when I heard my name mentioned by the club chairman - Nick. I immediately slid over to the group that was talking with him. All of a sudden, I had been put in charge of running the sales area! I panicked! I barely know my Melanochromis from my Metriaclima... How could I actually keep track of sales?? But I took a deep breath and committed. Let the fun begin.

The morning of the auction was pretty tame... We were supposed to meet at the church fellowship hall at 9am (auction site). I was a bit concerned because apparently if Greg shows up in a church - there is a concern of fire! The morning dawned damp and dreary. I made my way out to the hall and realized that the main road was blocked by a train. Not a long train, not a slow train, but a STOPPED train! I was familiar with the area - so I took a back route and made my way over. By 9:20 - only Greg, Lee Ann and myself were there. Chui and David showed up on our heels. Apparently everyone else was stuck by the train. We got the tables and chairs set up and then just waited... Folks started arriving about 10am. I was at the back with Lee Ann, selling raffle tickets

(Continued on page 3)

as she logged folks in. Buyers and sellers and lookers, oh my! They all began to arrive. And items, items, items... I think the final count was around 450 items that would be auctioned off this day. I think we were all surprised at how much stuff was showing up. We had some folks from TCA (Texas Cichlid Association) come down for our event. They were gracious enough to bring some equipment that included their auction software. They got everything set up and gave me a crash course. I bullied my buddy Terry into helping at the front table. (I think I said "Hey Terry, can you help me?") She would keep a paper record of all sales and I would enter into the computer. We were quite the team!

The auction started about 12:15. Carolyn, of Amazonia in Austin was our amazing auctioneer. Man, that woman could have sold the chairs right out from under people! She was great. She was so fast that we had a bit of trouble keeping up with her. But Terry and I plodded on... We had the best view in the house. We were in charge of logging in the fish before Carolyn began the bidding process. I still can't remember the names of most of the fish that passed in front of me that day. I can say that I am still SICK that I didn't have an empty tank at home - waiting for some new stock! I saw some beautiful fish. And the prices... can we talk cheap! Great day for buyers (not so much for sellers). Adult cichlids were going for \$10 a group! I saw a proven breeding trio of Yellow Jakes go for \$10. Carolyn kept up her pace for about an hour or so and then the relief "pitcher" stepped up. Dave Hanson took the mike and picked up where she left off. It was only after the auction was over that I found out this was Dave's first time on the auctioneer stand. He did a great job! So, Carolyn and Dave traded off with the mike all day. We had



guys bringing fish to the table for us to log in. We had guys walking the current items around so the crowd could get a good look. We had guys at the back, re-bagging if necessary (actually, I think that was only a **one** guy area - Dave S held down the fort). We had guys running the snack bar (yup, we had snacks - from home baked goodies to chips and sodas). We had guys bidding on fish. We were up to our necks in guys (used in

the generic sense - there were lots of girls there too!). Our auction contained everything from great fish to tanks to books to the elusive Texas Hole Rock. Terry and I got into a great routine and ended up sitting at that front table for the ENTIRE auction (which by the way lasted until 8pm).

When the last item was sold, I sat with the TCA folks and we

reconciled the computer with the paper records. We printed buyer and seller info (and I found amazingly few mistakes). The last of the Mohicans (or club members in this case) - put away the tables and chairs and walked out of that hall (which did NOT burn down that day) and felt pretty darn good about how the Hill Country Cichlid Club's first ever auction had turned out. Of course, the highlight of the auction had to belong to John Yull. John, who lives 50 miles from the auction site - stayed for the whole thing, in spite of the fact that his wife was due to deliver their second child at any time. When the final raffle number was pulled, John was holding the lucky ticket! He loaded the great 55gal setup into his car, with his fish purchases, and began the long drive home. Lucas was born that night. So, John was the big winner of the day - walking away with a 55gal tank and coming home with 6lbs 10oz of new son... Congratulations, John!

# HCCC Monthly Photo Contest

## First Place:

*Metriaclima estherae*  
Photo by Diane Tennison



## Second Place:

*Pseudotropheus acei*  
Photo by Diane Tennison



## Third Place:

*Pseudotropheus acei*  
Photo by Greg Steeves



A special thanks to Spencer Jack for judging our third photo contest. This month's topic was Malawian mbuna.

## Interview with Spencer Jack

By Dave Hansen

*Spencer Jack has been working with cichlids for over 20 years and can often be found at cichlid events giving lectures and showing his extensive cichlid photograph collection. Spencer's photographs have appeared on the cover of The Lateral Line on many occasions, including this month's Xystichromis sp. "flameback" photograph.*

**Dave:** We know you try to escape the comfortable winters of Winnipeg by traveling. Where have your travels taken you so far this year and what are you doing on these trips relating to fish?? Have you discovered any new species on these trips and do you have any pictures?

**Spencer:** Living in the cold arctic tundra I do my best to travel as much as possible during the winter. This winter has a few lined up so far and earlier this year I have gone on collecting trips to Mexico and Bolivia. Both trips were a great success and filled with unbelievable amounts of fish. On the trip to Bolivia we did manage to find a new dwarf *Crenicichla* it appears and a number of other fish are still being sorted as to what they in fact are. The diversity found in just one river system there is mind boggling.

**Dave:** For a guy who is so young to be so knowledgeable is amazing. Can you share your background on fish keeping and how you got into it.

**Spencer:** The first fish I kept were around the age of 3, just your standard goldfish as I was told I would be mesmerized whenever near fish. At age 5 a friend of the family gave me a 20 gallon tank with a bunch of tropical fish, after this i was hooked. At age 7 I discovered cichlids and managed to get a 180 gallon tank

*(Continued on page 5)*

from there I was a lost cause. I literally would spend about any money I had when I was younger on cichlids and has been a life long passion ever since. I really am the product of very understanding parents who allowed their 13 year old son to convert an entire basement to a fishroom.

**Dave:** We know you are a big Frontosa fan. How do you feel about the genus being split into 3 species?

**Spencer:** For many years I have complained that Frontosa should be split to at least five species. I get flack on this one from a number of authorities but after maintaining a great deal of geographical variants it becomes painfully obvious that they are different from one another, not only in body form and shape but behavior. The development of for the time three species under Cyphotilapia I hope at the very least will give some notice to hobbyists that there is diversity within this genus and to not mix your varieties up together.

**Dave:** Can you tell us some about your fishroom? Tanks, gallons, filtration, etc....The pictures I have seen are fantastic and would love to learn more about it.

**Spencer:** My current fishroom is in a state of expansion (when is a true fishroom not) however my main fishroom in my home currently contains 4100 gallons in around 40 tanks. Most of the room is driven by air and runs off of coarse ATI V sponges and the good old

fashion water changes. This month I am adding an additional twelve 180 gallon tanks though and am planning a far greater expansion for the spring. It seems I have finally given up holding back on the fish this past six months and continuing to say I really should find some sort of a "real" career with the seven years of university I have.

**Dave:** We are looking forward to you speaking at the ACA in FT. Worth next year. How many different speeches do you have and how many times a year do you usually speak. What are the topics you speak on and do you have a favorite subject?

**Spencer:** Currently I have around a dozen lectures I have built over the last four years or so. Most of the lectures are on Rift Lake cichlids but with my travels of late I have become a bit more of a generalist. In a typical year I speak 10-20 times... pretty much as many times as I am able to go. I personally love being able to travel and meet fellow hobbyists, in a way I enjoy this now almost more than keeping fish. I have really been fortunate over the last three or so years to meet a great deal of wonderful folks through this hobby. My favorite talk of the bunch to do as of late is my Confessions of a Cichlaholic. A little more open and less restricting than the typical fish identification talk that I seem to bore doing rather quickly.



Pseudotropheus elongatus vs. Labidochromis sp. perlmutt  
By Greg Steeves



Pseudotropheus demasoni  
By Dave Hansen



Pseudotropheus tropheops "Red Fin"  
By Nick Andreola



Metriaclima estherae OB  
By Greg Steeves

Pseudotropheus elongatus  
By Duc Nguyen



Pseudotropheus lanisticola  
By Duc Nguyen



Pseudotropheus polit  
By Nick Andreola



Iodotropheus sprengerae  
By Nick Andreola

Labidochromis  
caeruleus  
By Dave Hansen



Melanochromis Auratus  
By Nathan Currie



Melanochromis chipokae  
By Nathan Currie



Metriaclima callainos  
By Nathan Currie

All photos cropped for layout purposes

## Species Profile: Labidochromis caeruleus

— by Greg Steeves

This beautiful Malawian is commonly referred to as the "yellow lab". The electric yellow coloration and black lining on the dorsal fin allow Labidochromis

caeruleus to glow in a tank of mixed mbuna. This fish has been produced in sufficient quantity that it is readily available in almost any store that carries African cichlids.

There is always a ready market for any fry produced.

The caeruleus is a slow grower. When compared to other Malawians, it seems to take forever to gain size, but does spawn at around two inches. I had a "raising tank" with Labidochromis lividus and caeruleus of the exact same age. The lividus almost doubled the caeruleus in size. While on the small side, these fish can survive in a community tank of mixed Malawians quite nicely. Malawians, for the most part, keep aggression within their species. Community tanks should always be kept crowded with excellent filtration and frequent water changes. Much rock work will also benefit mbuna as these fish are territorial, and like their own "piece of the rock".

As mbuna go, the caeruleus can be considered peaceful. They will chase one

another around but rarely do any damage. If setting up a community tank with yellow labs in mind, another species to consider mixing with them is Iodotropheus

sprengerae. The Rusty cichlid's dark rust/purple coloration makes a great contrast. The color extremes show each fish off to its best. Dark gravel with shale

caves make a wonderful addition to a lab tank. You

really get an awesome look at this fish when it contrasts so drastically with its surroundings.

If there is one single thing you should watch with caeruleus, it is bloat. These fish do well on all types of food, but a

large portion of their dietary needs should be filled with plant matter. Romaine lettuce, spirulina flake, and raw peas are readily consumed. Less than



Photo by Greg Steeves



Holding female.  
Photo by Greg Steeves

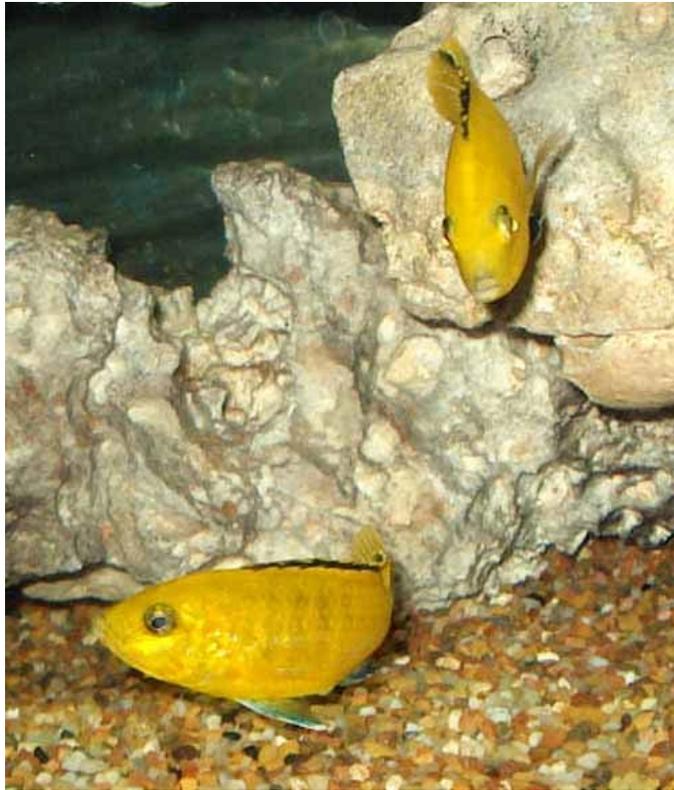
(Continued on page 8)

adequate water conditions and a high protein diet spell trouble for these gems.

Spawning occurs in the typical mbuna manner with the male and female circling each other. Brood sizes are small compared to other mbuna with 15-20 seeming to be average. *Labidochromis caeruleus* have very large eggs for an mbuna and this accounts for the small broods. The buccal cavity is just so big!

These fish are active, beautiful and vibrant. No self respecting keeper of mbuna could not have *Labidochromis caeruleus* in their collection.

Spawning pair  
Photo by Greg Steeves



## Species Profile: *Sciaenochromis fryeri*

— by Robert De Leon

Commonly known as an Electric Blue cichlid and erroneously identified as *Sciaenochromis ahli*, *S. fryeri* is a mainstay in the hobby. Its bright blue body and trademark white blaze make it very popular.

I obtain three juveniles that luckily turned out to be a male and two females. They were housed in a 75 gal tank along with some *Aulonocara* and some *Pundamilia nyere-rei*.

When I purchased them, I was fortunate to have an option as to which variant to choose. I chose the Maleri Island variant (aka Iceberg) because of its wide, white

blaze and red anal fin. These are by far my favorite variant.

I had read that *S. fryeri* often become hyper-dominant and difficult to keep

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with other fish. As mine grew, things appeared not be the case. My male developed rapidly and obtained its trade-mark colors.

At first it had more of a powder blue color but as it matured, the blue darkened into its adult dress. The females lack the glamour of the males and remain a dull silver/gray color.

When the male and females reached breeding age, the first signs of aggression began to develop. The day the female was ready to spawn, the male would become aggressive and chase all the other fish into a corner of the tank. After spawning was complete, everything would return to normal and the male would not bother any other fish in the tank. The female would occasionally be harassed by the male, but nothing serious.

The female would hold for a couple weeks and then I would move her into her own tank for the last week or so. There she would release her fry. After releasing, she was promptly returned to the main tank. I always feared that their predatory nature would result in eaten fry although I never gave her a chance to do so.

Spawns were large, usually 20+ fry. They grew quickly and it wasn't long before the two females were producing too many fry. I couldn't give them away fast enough. One thing I noticed was that the broods always seemed to be male heavy. I had heard that was the case but assumed it had to do with the practice of giving hormones to fry for

retain purposes resulting in tanks full of what appeared to be all bright, colorful one inch males.



S. Fryeri "Maleri Island"  
Photo by Robert De Leon

As time went on, the aggression problems I had heard of really started to show. No longer was the male aggressive only during spawning time, but he was terrorizing the tank constantly. The females regularly took a beating and all the other fish were bunched into an ever shrinking area of the tank. Because of my limited tank space, I could no longer continue to keep my S. fryeri. For the sake of all the other fish in the tank, I



was forced to find them a new home. They hadn't even reached their full size! They are beautiful fish, but as they mature, they definitely need lots of tank space.

S. Fryeri "Maleri Island"  
Photo by Robert De Leon

## Species Profile: *Astatotilapia aeneocolor*

— by Greg Steeves

The 2003 FOTAS (Federation of Texas Aquarium Societies) convention in Houston, Texas was a most impressive event. World class speakers, a fish show, and best of all, a huge auction combined for a most enjoyable weekend. The FOTAS auction presented many fish, especially killies and cichlids, that are not entirely commonly in the hobby. One of the many finds we happened upon here was the lacustrine hap, *Astatotilapia aeneocolor*.

*Astatotilapia aeneocolor* hails from East Africa; more specifically, Lakes George, Albert, Edward and their tributaries. Wild populations are usually found near the water's edge in such evasive areas as submerged tree roots. *Astatotilapia aeneocolor* is an opportunistic omnivore and undemanding in regard to food in captivity. Adult males reach nearly three inches, with females slightly smaller. Reproduction begins when the fish are still under an inch in length. It is amazing to see a tiny female brooding. Her buccal cavity full of eggs is disproportionately huge when compared to her body size. One wonders how the fish can remain buoyant. Female *aeneocolors* are excellent at holding a brood. I have netted females immediately after spawning and transferred to a holding tank without them spitting the clutch as many other mouthbrooders will. After 18 days of brooding, our small females release around 10 tiny fry. The fry grow quickly on Cyclopeeze and crushed

flake. In five to six months, young *Astatotilapia aeneocolor* reach maturity and will begin spawning. As size increases, so does the number of fry a female will incubate. Although we have never had a



huge spawn, I am told that broods can reach in excess of 50 young.

Our first *Astatotilapia aeneocolor* spawn occurred when our small group was housed with some small *Pundamilia nyererei* Igombe Island. The two dominant males of each species constantly

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*Astatotilapia aeneocolor*  
Photo by Greg Steeves

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displayed to each other for control of the tank. This power struggle never got horribly physical. The colors that the males displayed made for a stunning display. Fearing that the 20 gallon tank these colonies were in was a bomb waiting to explode, I moved the *Astatotilapia aeneocolor* group into a 55 gallon with a group of young *Pyxichromis orthostoma* from Lake Nawampasa. This seemed to be a good mix until one evening, while trying my hand at some photography, I peered into this tank and noticed one of the *P. orthostoma* with a tail sticking from it's mouth. Unable to believe what I was seeing, I netted this fish out and manually pulled the meal from it's mouth. It was a female *aeneocolor* almost the size of the Lake Nawampasa piscivore. Lesson learned, never house anything with *Pyxichromis orthostoma* that is smaller than they are. The amazing twist to this story was that not only did the female *aeneocolor* survive, she spawned in a new tank the next day!

*Astatotilapia aeneocolor* is undemanding with regard to aquatic decor. They do seem to feel more relaxed with rock caves and plastic plants. In the aquarium *Astatotilapia aeneocolor* spends most of it's time in the open, but I believe aqua-

scaping relaxes them and shows this species off to its best. I do not believe that *Pundamilia nyererei* is the best choice as



a tank mate as haplochromines from this region are capable of hybridization. I would recommend housing *Astatotilapia aeneocolor* with some of the smaller Malawian *Auloncara*, or much differently colored smaller Victorian cichlids. Others I have spoken with that keep *Astatotilapia aeneocolor* reportedly house their groups with *mbuna*, *Julidochromis* and some *Neolamprologus* species.

Whatever setup you may choose or what tankmates you may choose, *Astatotilapia aeneocolor* is an easy-going colorful little fish that is certain to become a favorite.

*Pundamilia nyererei* and *Astatotilapia aeneocolor*  
Photo by Greg Steeves

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## Species Profile: *Cyprichromis leptosoma*

— by Robert De Leon

*Cyprichromis leptosoma* always reminded me of sardines. Not just because of their elongated shape, but also because they school in huge numbers. In the wild they move around in large groups eating plankton in the open water.

They come in many color variants and in two sizes. There are the jumbos which reach sizes of about 4.5-5 inches and the non-jumbos which get between 3-3.5 inches. Both variants do well when kept in large groups in tanks with lots of swimming room. These fish aren't very aggressive and don't do well with fish that are very aggressive.

For years I had always wanted to have a tank full of *C. leptosoma* but the cost got in the way. When the opportunity to purchase a large group juveniles at a great price came up, I jumped on it. The variant was my favorite, Utinta. Utinta males have a fluorescent blue color with either yellow or blue tails. Another characteristic of Utinta males is an ocellus on the posterior of the dorsal fin. Females are a dull gray in color.

The group grew quickly on a diet of flakes, small pellets and Cyclop-eeze. It wasn't long before a few males started appearing. Multiple males in a tank can coexist without problems. They swim around displaying to each other and to females. Shortly thereafter some of the females had mouthfuls of eggs.

Fry are release in about 2 to 3 weeks and are surprisingly large in size. Fry are left

alone by the adult leptosomas but are easy prey for other tank inhabitants.

Separating the female when their buccal cavity turns black with mature fry serves to save the offspring. Females

were soon returned to the main tank and rejoined the group without problems. In a species only tank, females can release their fry into the tank without problems.

*C. leptosomas* are very colorful and if you have a tank that is at least 4 feet long, you should give them a try. One thing I did notice is that when I removed Cyclop-eeze (frozen live food) from their diet, the coloration of the males faded and less females were holding. They definitely need more than flake and pellets to be at their best.



*Cyprichromis leptosoma*  
Male, Utinta  
Photo by Robert De Leon

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