

# The Lateral Line

Volume 1, Issue 3

August 1, 2004

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# BAP Report

July has seen some changes to the standings. Dave has surged up with our first *Cynotilapia afra* spawn and we've had the first three entries from a new member, Blair. He has spawned our club's first *Cyprichromis leptosoma* and *Lethrinops marginatus*.

New members will probably be the driving force for our BAP as older members run out of point earning spawns.

Lets keep those fish healthy and spawning and don't forget to submit your BAP reports to earn your points. Don't forget, HCCC members can purchase BAP offspring at unbelievable prices.

Current Standings	
Greg	270
Charles	110
Duc	95
Dave	90
Robert	85
Paul	85
Lisa	60
Blair	55
Brian	40
Christina	25

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## Upcoming Events:

- August Meeting TBA, visit our website for more information.
- Cichlid Day 2004 Auction October 23rd,

**Cover Photo:**  
**Lamprologus ocellatus** guarding eggs.  
 by Spencer Jack

# Cichlid Day 2004 Auction

The Hill Country Cichlid Club is proud to announce that a date has been set for our first special event. The auction will be held on Saturday, October 23rd at 12:00 P.M. Everyone is welcome to participate. Hobbyists and professionals will be bringing fish and other items. Non-members are welcome.

A couple weeks ago, the Bracken United Methodist Church Fellowship Hall in

San Antonio was rented with funds generated from yearly dues and BAP fish donations. All monies generated from the auction will go to fund larger upcoming events in which we hope to have guest speakers, fish shows and more auctions.

For more information about the Cichlid Day Auction, see page 15 of this newsletter or visit [www.xdeleon.com/hccc](http://www.xdeleon.com/hccc)

# Picture of the Month



Pictured above is a *Haplochromis* sp. 35.

# Texas State Aquarium

— by Lee Ann Steeves

Wouldn't it be great if there were a huge public aquarium dedicated entirely to cichlids? Unfortunately, there's not one, but there is a wonderful marine aquarium just a few hours' drive from San Antonio that lends itself to the cichlid enthusiast's vivid imagination...



The Texas State Aquarium in Corpus Christi, Texas. I took my vacation this week, and decided to treat Greg and Karli to their first ever trip to the beautiful South Coast. The Aquarium was the ultimate destination, of course...that beach thing is naturally just something you do to kill time right?

Anyway, we couldn't help but picture our cichlids in those huge tanks... I don't think we passed by one tank that we didn't say something like, "wow... can you imagine filling this thing up with mbuna?" Actually, I think what Greg kept saying was "Victorians", but since I'm the one writing this thing, it gets to be my favorite fish, right?

As we entered the first room, we were greeted by a large, shallow habitat containing estuarian species. On the end facing the entrance to the room were fish found in a 'common zone' between fresh and salt water. Behind this area was a 'land' area that housed shore birds found in the same area, including a duck that found it very difficult to navigate the sandy bank toward the shallow, sandy

area behind it that contained several young sharks, rays and a flounder.

Of course, the first thing I thought of was, "Wow! This would make a GREAT tank for *Enantiopus melanogenys*!" Yes, I know they're not brackish fish, but the tank... it's sooo perfect!

On the wall opposite this display was a tank with reptiles in it... alligator babies, turtles... stuff you really don't want to feed your fingers to. The water looked dark, and the tank was tall... so naturally I was thinking Angels - altum perhaps.

Next we came to this shallow star-shaped pool that had sea urchins, hermit crabs and sailfin mollies in it. This was sort of a petting area.



Years ago there were small starfish in this pool, but I suspect they found that they didn't like being handled all that much. After turning a few urchins over to see what they were made of, I envisioned taking them out and putting shell-dwellers in this tank, such as *Neolamprologus calliurus*. I know shellers hang out in deeper water than this, but still... my imagina-

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tion ran away with me, and I decided it would also look great with some goby cichlids like *Eretmodus*, or even some of the smaller flashy cichlids like *Hemichromis*.

In the rooms that followed these, there were several smaller tanks. One in particular caught my eye. It housed a couple of horseshoe crabs, some flounders, a batfish (yes, that's what it's called - I expected to see that long angelfish looking thingie, but this looks more like a bat on the ground), and some sea horses. I thought rams would be awfully cute in this tank. Greg kept stepping on my toe when I said things like that, so by now I was learning to just take pictures and keep my mouth shut like a good little tourist.

Next came a good-sized tank with lots of rock work in the background. It was as tall as the wall and a good 6-8 feet wide. I thought this would make an excellent mbuna tank, given enough turbulence, light and algae. Greg thought it



would better suit some nyererei. Instead, it housed a lot of marine life... sergeant majors, angels and butterfly fish to name a few.

There was a dome-shaped tank that was kind of interesting too. It housed some smaller non-vertebrate life forms including this peppermint shrimp and the scallop, who sat there right in front of the tank wall with his shell wide open showing off every one of his 32 blue eyes. This would have been a great *Julidochromis* tank by the way. Just thought I'd mention it.

Then there was a huge column tank in the middle of the room that looked like it would be a great place to keep some of the deeper open-water fish like *Cyphotilapia frontosa* or *Benthochromis tricoti*. Of course it would look totally awesome with a huge school of *Cyprichromis* spiraling up and down. Snapping out of it though, I saw that it did indeed house schooling fish. Most of the fish in this tank were silver... I have no idea what they were exactly, but it was a stunning display. It was very difficult to get good pictures from these tanks though, because of the refraction from the curved sides.

One of the many aquariums included a small reef tank pictured below. I'm sorry, but it's just so beauti-



ful that even my imagination couldn't picture replacing this with cichlids. Everything was thriving (no damsels in distress here)... perfect just the way it is!

On the adjacent wall was a very small tank (maybe a foot by a foot). If you look carefully near the base of the plants, you will see pipefish. See that shell in



the background? Yep... I'm thinking ocellatus too!

Another nearby tank showed the different critters that live in floating sargassum. You know that seaweed that sometimes washes up on shore? Yep, that's the stuff. It floats around in the gulf stream, and lots of critters make it home, including tiny baby sea turtles! Anyway, some of the fish that have evolved to live here have developed special fins that help camouflage it... like this angelfish-looking thing. It's not a very good picture, but I really wanted to illustrate what I meant. As you can see in the picture,



one of the other fish has developed markings to help it hide in the sargassum as well.

Yet another tank with sergeant-majors, angels and butterflies... yet another tank that spawned wild visions of large cichlids living in large groups... perhaps huge flocks of Aulonocara, Copadichromis or Protomelas! This particular fish was of striking beauty. It is a rock beauty angelfish (Holocanthus tricolor). Apparently this fish is difficult to keep in captivity, but the specimen we saw seemed quite spunky.



Next we get to the BIG BIG BIG fish. I think the display is called "Islands of Steel". This tank is really really really huge. The big catches live in there.... sharks, sea turtles, groupers, humpback whales (just kidding!)... It basically



shows what lives under and around the big oil rigs out in the gulf... these big steel structures have become a reef of

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sorts - something for clingy-life to hang onto and other life to feed on which bigger other life feeds on, etc etc... basically creating a veritable cafeteria for the big guys. Wouldn't that be a great tank for *Boulengerochromis microlepis*? Or, if you're a smart-alec like Greg, you might want to put a single pair of *Neolamprologus multifasciatus* in there.

Next we came to a room apparently geared toward kids. Lots of Nemo-esque displays in there, including this tank that houses a blue tang (Dory ... she speaks whale, you know!). It also is home to a couple of lion (king?) fish and an interesting zebra-striped eel that insisted on hanging out UNDER the grass in the bottom of the tank. He was gone before I could get the camera focused... which was really hard since the tank itself was one of those columnar ones. Lesson learned... flat glass is your friend if you want to take fish pictures! Since we love taking fish pictures, I just couldn't imagine putting cichlids in this tank. I was so frustrated by it that I handed the camera over to Greg... the master!



Of course, no lion-fish tank would be complete without a giraffe.

There was even a Harry Potter themed tank. It had large castle-like structures, and a statue of Hagrid, and if you looked very carefully for movement, these big boulders in the background appeared to be breathing... and they had eyes... I still don't know what they were, but I'm assuming they were some kind of stonefish. I tried to get pictures but because the Aquarium requested that no flash be used on some of the tanks, I had to do it without the flash and they came out really fuzzy. I can't see decorating a cichlid tank with Harry Potter things, but I could see putting some *Steatocranus* in there. I don't know what made me think of those. Maybe it was the round head and still nature of the fish that lived in there.

The tank next to it was home to three frogfish. Like their name implies, these fish look a lot like frogs, and they sit there ... well... like frogs. It took a few seconds before I saw them at all because they were sitting so still. Bizarre looking creatures, these ambush predators are in the same group as anglerfish, and one small species of frogfish, the Sargassum fish (*Histrio histrio*) lives in the sargassum weed and actually has prehensile fins to help it move through the weed in search of food.

Another tank housed a huge pacific octopus hiding behind some buried treasure that wasn't buried. There were also some pretty cool starfish in that tank. Yet another had some really large spiny lob-



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sters in it. These lobsters are different from Maine lobsters... they don't have the huge front claws.

Speaking of lobsters, they have a really cool blue one that has been on TV. His tank was decorated in spilled paint. According to the plaque by the



tank, this is a natural but rare color morph that occurs with the normally-colored lobsters. If you cook it, it still turns red. Weird, eh? I don't think this one will be testing that theory though.

Next we came to the 'Flower Gardens'. The Flower Gardens is a coral reef about 300 miles east of Houston, and about 60 feet straight down. The reason it's called the Flower Gardens is because Spanish explorers looked straight down into the water and saw so much color that it looked like a sunken flower garden to them. The corals grew onto salt domes that billowed up from the bottom of the gulf. The reef is relatively small and definitely isolated, and very well protected... by law anyway. I read somewhere that below the corals themselves there is a place where the salt still spews out a little and has created a brine lake about 210 feet wide and about 10 inches deep. There are some bacteria that thrive in this environment, and some

fish have developed the ability to take short dives into this salty wash to take advantage of this food source. Anyway, the Aquarium has re-created part of the Flower Gardens in the one big tank, and we got to see the presentation given at feeding time. It's really an interesting presentation, and I recommend that you catch it if you can. There is a ray in the tank that is 'bottle trained'... he takes his krill from the plastic bottle in the diver's hands... just sucks it out like a baby... it's really funny. The girl that gave the presentation also gave some useful information to those of us that like to go wading in the gulf... how to not get stung by a sting-ray. Basically, you don't want to 'walk' like you do on land... you want to shuffle your feet as you go along. This warns them to get out of the way and you're not nearly as likely to step on them as you might otherwise be. Oh, I almost forgot... this tank? Trophus! What else?

Between this room and the out door, there is a room with several jellyfish tanks. Obviously we couldn't take pictures, but it was worth seeing. Some of them are bioluminescent and watching their iridescent colors ripple along their insides is mesmerizing. Did you know there is a type of freshwater jellyfish that lives in Lake Tanganyika in Africa? Wouldn't it be interesting to get those into our tanks with our cichlids? I bet they would be very



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hard to keep. Still... I wonder where they keep the peanut butter fish??

Next we went outside to see the dolphins. This one in particular was going through the ropes. I'm not sure who was being trained... the dolphin or the human in the white shirt. She sure looked like she was having fun, though.



Downstairs from the dolphin exhibit were several more exhibits, including a petting area with rays and small sharks, a sea-otter habitat, a sea-turtle habitat and a bird and reptile display.

The pet-a-ray tank was really cool (they had removed the stingers of course)... sting rays feel a lot like jello on their top-side. For some reason the Aquarium insists that you only pet them with two fingers. I don't know what that reason is, but it makes you wonder if they're trained to attack if you touch them with three? We found an egg case in that pool. People around us had no idea what it was, and it's probably just as well. We tossed it toward the back of the pool where people couldn't reach, just in case the Aquarium people wanted to salvage it.

Karli had some close encounters with the sea turtles. If you look closely, they have big black eyes... they do look a little alien-like don't they? Apparently these turtles (I think this one may be a Ridley) are endan-



gered, and the Aquarium has taken several in that have been too injured to make it in the wild (some of them are missing flippers, for example).

Our final stop at the Aquarium was at the bird and reptile exhibit. Karli got to hold (well, touch) a baby alligator! It really made her day. The bird part of this exhibit consisted of several birds of prey that had been too injured to return to the wild. I think it's great that this 'zoo' is giving these animals a new lease on life.

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All in all, the trip to the Texas State Aquarium was fantastic. I highly recommend it to anyone. Even though it's not full of cichlids, as you can see, you can still pretend it is. Maybe someday someone will build a cichlid zoo. In the meantime... keep dreaming!

Now... let's hit that beach!

*(All photos courtesy of the Steeves family).*



## Tips for Setting Up Your New Aquarium: Part II

— by Bob Nuckols

*Originally appeared in FAMA March 2004.  
Reprinted with permission from author.*

[In the July issue of the Lateral Line, various topics were covered including location, preparing your new aquarium, types of filtration and biological media]

Time for the decorations. Add the rocks, driftwood, action ornaments, and plants to decorate the aquarium. Whether your tank is natural or not, remember to leave some open areas in the front of the aquarium for the fish to swim. Take your time and try to imagine how you want your aquarium to look and how to make the decorations look their best. Try not to move the decorations after the fish are in the aquarium because this can stress the fish.

Now that the water and decorations are in the aquarium, you must make sure that the water is safe to add the fish. That means adding some type of water conditioner. The purpose of this is to remove

chlorine, chloramine, ammonia and other harmful chemicals. Ask the pet store personnel for advice on which product works best with your local water.

The aquarium is filled, decorated, and the water is conditioned - time to add the fish, right? Well, not quite. The water needs to be the correct temperature for the fish you are going to keep. For goldfish, room temperature is fine but for tropical fish you will need a heater. For most of us a heater of five watts per gallon is fine. And most tropical fish prefer the temperature to be between 75-80 degrees F. To see what the temperature is, be sure to buy a thermometer and put it where you can see it. Check the temperature every day because heaters can and do fail. Always check the heater before using it for cracks or flaws, you certainly don't want you or your fish to get shocked. Also don't leave the heater

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***“Whether your tank is natural or not, remember to leave some open areas in the front of the aquarium for the fish to swim.”***

plugged in if it is out of the water - it can overheat and break; or if it just gets hot and is put back into the aquarium, it can break. So be careful.

Lighting is nice to have on your aquarium. Besides allowing you to see your fish better, a light hood will also reduce evaporation and keep the fish from jumping out. Cut out the back strip to make room for the heater, filter, etc. Fluorescent hoods are the best because they use less energy, produce little heat, the bulbs last longer and they provide a more even light. A simple on/off timer can be used to light the aquarium for eight to ten hours a day. Avoid too much light as that could lead to algae blooms.

Now, are we ready to add the fish? Not quite yet, it is important to test your water before you add the fish for unacceptable levels of ammonia, nitrite and pH. There are many ways of controlling these levels; a good test kit will help you monitor them. Remember, it will take several weeks to establish the bacteria you will need. A test kit will help you decide when it is safe to add the "good" fish.

Okay, time to add the fish. Try a few fish to make sure your aquarium is set up right. Float the fish in the bag for ten to

fifteen minutes before opening the bag and adding a little of the aquarium water. Add some water every fifteen minutes, after about an hour look at the fish. Are they doing fine? They should be swimming around looking for a way out of the bag. If they are looking good, release them into the tank but don't add the water from the bag. If they don't look ready, take a little longer to acclimate them to your tank.

The fish of course will need to be fed. I feed my fish only once a day but some people feed their fish more often. Just make sure they eat all the food that is given to them. If they don't finish all the food in five minutes, look for problems. If they are all well, feed less next time and you can judge how much food the fish really need.

Lastly, enjoy the aquarium! Fish can be both fun and educational. Watching the fish can be stress relieving, so relax and enjoy them. You should be concerned about the fish but don't let it drive you nuts if all is not going well. Use common sense, take your time and it will all work out. Remember this is supposed to be fun.

Happy fishkeeping!

***“...it is important to test your water before you add the fish for unacceptable levels of ammonia, nitrite and pH.”***

## **Julidochromis transcriptus 'Gombe'**

— by *Duc Nguyen*

I acquired my initial group of seven *Julidochromis transcriptus* 'Gombe' from a seller off of aquabid.com back in 2000. The colony is still going strong till this day. These are the first Julie-type that I've kept. I just wanted to write a brief summary of my experiences with these wonderful fish.

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When I got my group, they were still juveniles; they were about 1.5 - 2 inches in length. I had them in a 10 gallon tank with no substrate and no other tank mates. It was loaded with caves for them to hide in. After about 6 months or so, I started to notice that there was a pair that kept hanging out together in a terracotta cave but I didn't take too much notice of them. I started to observe that this pair continuously chased off the other fish in the tank. At the time, I had no other larger tanks for them so I gave Greg and Lee Ann Steeves four of my fish; keeping three of my own. After removing the fish, the aggression level was much better.

After about another three months, I moved into my apartment and brought these guys with me. This time, I housed them in a 20 long with a sandy substrate and lined with a lot of caves for them. I also used a sponge filter. At first, it took a while for them to get acclimated; the pair bond still existed between the original pair. After about a month, I noticed that there were these teeny tiny fish that were scaling against the cave. I got very excited since I've never seen these guys spawn before. The parents just let them swim wherever they wanted to. They grew out very slowly. Unfortunately, I moved again from my apartment to my current home so I had to move them again after six months in the apartment. I did my best to keep the tank the same,

but that's just impossible. I was not able to save any of the fry from the Julies. When moving the tank, the pair bond still remained and they were already back to spawning in no time.



Till this day, I still have the original parents. There's a definite size difference between the male and female. There's the smaller of the two, which got about 3 inches (I'm assuming this is the male), and then there's the larger one which is about 4.5 inches (I'm assuming this is the female). The larger of the two kept watch over the cave where the other one just kind of hangs out. I think these fish are extremely interesting in looks and in behavior. Notoriously, Julies tend to be pretty aggressive, but mine weren't too bad. For example, the pair that's in the tank now tolerates the spare male. He just doesn't swim over to their end of the tank. I feed mine Tetramin Cichlid flakes. I also feed them occasional baby brine shrimp and spirulina flakes.

Overall, I would highly recommend the Julidochromis transcriptus. They're an extremely attractive fish and a great addition to anyone's Cichlid collection.

***“When moving the tank, the pair bond still remained and they were already back to spawning in no time.”***

# Breeding Mbuna 101

— by Scott Carlson

*Originally appeared in the Iowa Aquaria Association newsletter, April 2004. Reprinted with permission from the author and association.*

One of the most fascinating and rewarding aspects of keeping African cichlids is breeding them. I occasionally get an excited call or email asking, "Are my fish spawning?" My experience is limited to the Mbuna, rock-dwelling mouth-brooders from Lake Malawi. In this article I will relate my personal observations.

A few days before a spawn, a female will begin to get fatter as her eggs develop. This may or may not be a noticeable change to us depending on the individual fish and how observant you are. The dominant male Mbuna, on the other hand, will be acutely aware of this development and give us some very obvious signs that a female is becoming gravid or "ripe". He will display absurdly extravagant gestures. Variations of the familiar posturing, leaning, trembling and chasing used to intimidate are also employed in courtship. As a male makes a fool out of himself with frenzied theatrics, the female typically ignores him. It seems the male often gets started way before the female does. Eventually the female's genital papilla (also called her ovipositor or egg tube) "drops and she is receptive. She begins to take the male seriously and the courtship heightens, now with a bonus: participation by the female.

The male will attempt to lure a receptive female to a site he has selected and/or prepared for spawning. This is usually inside a cave, just outside the entrance to a cave, on a flat rock, or in a shallow

depression in the substrate. Preparation is usually no more than the removal of substrate providing a "clean" site. Sometimes there is no preparation at all, with fish spawning at random locations



around the tank. This is species specific and individual specific. I have witnessed Pseudotropheus Zebra "Yellow-tail Avanti" spawning vertically against the back glass of the tank. Once the female is enticed into the spawning area, spawning begins. The male leans away from the female and begins turning in slow small circles while spreading and vibrating his anal fin. The egg spots (or egg dummies) present on many male Mbuna's anal fin resemble real eggs. Shaking them apparently really does the trick, as the female seems to become hypnotized by them. She will assume an "I" formation orienting her perpendicular to the male, while nibbling at the elusive eggs. Obeying an irresistible urge to get them into her mouth, she futilely nibbles at them. They do not dislodge.

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***"It seems the male often gets started way before the female does."***

A note about egg-spots: while the use of egg-spots specifically for "deception" is not fully accepted by science it is supported by anecdotal observation. However, their use or even presence is not crucial to successful spawning. Many species and individual males have no egg-spots at all, yet still reproduce. Conversely, many females do have egg spots. Female egg-spots are supposed to lack the transparent ring around the yellow center. I have found it very difficult to see the difference. Does this suggest that the movement alone of the anal fin is important and adequate for successful spawning?

About half way through a turn (around 3 seconds?) they quickly reverse roles with the male assuming the "I" formation and nibbling at the female's anal fin, more specifically her papilla, which is located just in front of her anal fin. The alternating turning/nibbling may continue off and on for minutes or even days before the first real eggs appear. There are lots of "practice runs" and lots of breaks. Often they are interrupted by opportunistic tank-mates hoping to steal a delicious egg. The male occasionally excuses himself to chase and bit spectators. Eventually the female is stimulated into dropping eggs. Normally one to five eggs are dropped at each turn. The female quickly snatches them up at the completion of her "turn" on her way to assuming the "I" position for his "turn". At that moment, the male releases milt from his vent, located just in front of his anal fin. It is fanned by the vibrating of the anal fin directly toward and into the female's nibbling mouth. As it is ingested, the eggs are fertilized.

So maybe you missed all the pageantry, but while feeding, you notice a female that eagerly swims up with the group

only to stare at the food then quickly retreats back down to the rocks to pace nervously. Maybe she makes a second trip up to inspect, and then rejects the food. Maybe she even makes a third trip and gently eases a tiny piece of food into her mouth, without opening it all the way, then panics and retreats again.



Maybe she looks like she already has a mouthful of food and occasionally "chews" it. These are all pretty good signs she is brooding or "holding".

What next? As ethical hobbyists we should strive to do what is best for Mon and kids. For the first approximately four days she holds eggs. Then, providing they are fertile, the eggs develop tiny heads and tails. While Mon broods she will eat very little or no food at all. Some evidence suggests that the fry eat some of the food if she does ingest any. At around 18 days (species and individual specific) she will begin shopping for a "safe" place to release her free-swimming, fully developed, but miniature fry. If she cannot find a "safe" place, she may delay releasing longer

Female *Maylandia estherae* with mouth full of eggs.

than is healthy for her. The tank she spawned in is probably not "safe". Once release, parental care pretty much ends. The fry are not safe, even from Mon, and Dad hasn't been any help since donating milt.

What can be done to maintain Mon's health and help ensure the survival of, at least, some of the fry? I am aware of four methods that are commonly employed and will discuss them in agonizing detail next month.

## Friends of the HCCC

Various businesses have pledged their support to the HCCC. Some offer discounts to club members while others make their facilities available for meetings and other events. Their contributions are greatly appreciated and add an additional benefit to club members. Links to these organizations can be found at [www.xdeleon.com/hccc/links.php](http://www.xdeleon.com/hccc/links.php). They include:

**River City Aquatics**

*Home of the Rare and Wonderful*  
(512) 219-7200  
12108 Roxie Drive, Suite D - Austin TX



**Armke's Rare Aquarium Fish**

Specializing in the rare cichlids and catfishes of Africa



*Tropical Fish Specialists and Full line supplier for all your pets*

512-257-3229

13497 Research Blvd., Ste #700 Austin, TX 78750

**Amazonia**

**"Home of the Fishheads"**

(512) 451-0958

4631 Airport #116 - Austin, TX

## Available BAP Fish

The following species are currently available to HCCC members only.

- Haplochromis sp. Flameback
- Lethrinops marginatus
- Neolamprologus olivaceous

- Neolamprologus falcicula
- Lepidiolamprologus hecqui
- Neolamprologus multifasciatus
- Haplochromis sp. "44"
- Pelvichromis pulcher
- Astatotilapia latifasciata



# HCCC Cichlid Day Fish Auction

The Hill Country Cichlid Club would like to invite fish enthusiasts to join us for our fish auction. Hobbyists and professionals will be bringing fish and other items. Non-members are welcome to attend and take part.

**Event:** Cichlid Day Auction

**Date:** Saturday October 23, 2004

**Time:** 12:00pm until it's over

**Location:** Bracken United Methodist  
Church Fellowship Hall  
20377 FM2252  
San Antonio, TX

- Fish Auction
- Dry Goods
- Raffle Items
- Cash Only Please

**For maps and more information as it becomes available, visit our website at: [www.xdeleon.com/hccc](http://www.xdeleon.com/hccc)**