

BIG LIPPED CICHLID, *Chilotilapia euchilus*

By Chase Klinesteker SWAM, Mar-April 2008



Young Male Big Lipped Cichlid

DESCRIPTION

Chilotilapia euchilus is a rarely seen African cichlid from the shallow rocky coasts of Lake Malawi. Other names this fish is known under include *Cyrtocara euchilus*, *Cheilochromis euchilus*, and *Haplochromis euchilus*. Fully mature adults have enlarged lips that are used to graze algae on rocks and dig in the bottom. Males are larger and more brilliantly colored than females and at full maturity are extremely beautiful. They have bright reflective blue over most of their body and into their fins. Orange red spotting is dispersed throughout the body and fins, especially the anal fin. The orange top border of the dorsal fin is very distinctive. Bright yellow is present in the chest and lower face area to complement the other colors. These fish have a hearty appetite and will eat all kinds of foods. Vegetable matter and insects are their main food source in nature, so I made sure the diet included some spirulina flake food. Seashells and rocks containing lime are used in the tank to help maintain hardness and a high PH. They are open water swimmers and need plenty of room. Breeding is reported to be rare, probably because of the extreme aggressiveness of the males toward the females. 75 to 79 degrees F. is a good comfortable range for them. They are mouthbrooders and females may hold up to 150 fry.

BREEDING

I obtained four 1 ½ inch fry at the Grand Valley Aquarium Club Swap Meet in January of 2007. Their reputation is for getting large (12 inches) and nasty. I knew that I had a challenge if I wanted to breed them since I don't have tanks big enough to house that large a fish (mostly 20 gallon), and my experience with nasty fish has been marginal. I often have raised 6 or 8 African cichlid fry together, only to end up with one large, mean fish! As the fry grew, the 2 larger fish began to color up and get more aggressive towards each other and the 2 smaller fish, which were likely females. My plan was to grow them as quickly as possible, breed them young, and pass them on. The 2 females were placed in another aquarium of African cichlids where they could be dominant and get plenty of food to grow. This species does not seem to be unusually aggressive towards

other African cichlids, just their own kind. When the females were about 2 ½ inches, one appeared to be filling up with eggs, so one male was placed in their tank. The male was about 3 inches and had hints of color that the fully mature males possess, including blue body, facial yellow, and orange red spotting. I was not sure that he was sexually mature, as the literature states it takes a long time for this fish, but he proved otherwise and bred with one of the females. He soon became overly aggressive and had to be removed from the tank with the females. It is important when moving fish around to different tanks that the tank they are in be properly labeled and that the species are different enough to be distinguished apart.

RAISING FRY

The female holding eggs was watched closely and the date of spawning was written on the tank. At about 2 weeks, the female was held by hand under water in a pan and the fry removed by pumping her mouth open and closed with a toothpick. About 20 fry were collected and put in a small tank. They had hatched and could swim a little, but still had a fairly large egg yolk, so they were not fed until most had been absorbed. They were smaller than most African cichlid fry, but they took live baby brine shrimp and grew quite slowly. Although I would love to have seen my male fish in their fully mature beauty, I passed them on in an auction for someone else to enjoy because I didn't have the space for that.

I would recommend anyone with some experience raising African cichlids to try breeding this fish, especially if they have the tank space to grow them to full size and enjoy their striking beauty.