

BOLIVIAN CICHLID, *Cichlasoma boliviense*

By Chase Klinesteker SWAM, Nov-Dec 2009



Male Bolivian Cichlid

DESCRIPTION

The Bolivian Cichlid (Kullander, 1983) is an attractive but somewhat shy fish from the Amazon river basin in Bolivia and the Madre de Dios drainage in Peru. Yellow is found in all fins and there is a striking dark horizontal band from the eye to the base of the tail with larger black spots in its' center and base of tail. Sometimes just the 2 spots show and the band is gone. Vertical banding is lighter and can vary with the mood of the fish. There is a bright silvery sheen on the chest and gill plate areas. They are found around shallow clay shores and pools in muddy water. It should not be confused with the Bolivian Ram (*Microgeophagus altispinosus*), which is a smaller and quite different fish. The Bolivian cichlid reminds me of a *Laetacara curviceps* in mouth and body shape, markings, and disposition, although it gets somewhat larger (4-6 inches maximum). In a tank of similar sized South American cichlids, it usually hides or is the one picked on, so I found that a species tank with a pair or trio was the best. A fast dither fish or 2 helped to bring the pair out to feed, which took a while due to their shyness. The male can become aggressive, so plenty of rock and cave cover should be available to the female. One day one of the females jumped out and virtually "dried up" on the floor. When I finally noticed, I picked her up. She was dry to the touch, but her body was limp and I noticed a slight movement in the gills, so I put her back in the water in a separate tank. Soon she was swimming around and in a few weeks after salt treatment was fully recovered! This fish is one tough cookie!!

BREEDING

The Bolivian Cichlid will eat a variety of foods once it becomes established, including pellets, flakes, live, and frozen. The male is usually larger, has more color, and longer anal and dorsal fin extensions. Temperatures from 73 to 82 degrees, PH 6.5- 7.7, and medium water hardness will suit them fine. Their lifespan ranges from 5-8 years. They like hiding places, may uproot plants, and prefer low or no current flow in their tank. They are not seen often in the hobby and are noted to be difficult to breed, possibly because of their shyness. I tried to get them to breed for quite a while with no success because the male would not let the female eat well, so I put her in another tank with more docile fish where she could eat and fill up with eggs. The female was about 3 inches and the male about 4 inches. When I reintroduced her she laid 2-300 tiny eggs on top of a flowerpot on its' side. The male was very thorough in fertilizing the eggs and made several more passes over them than the female. I removed about 1/3 of the eggs from the pot with a siphon to hatch separately and insure my BAP points, and left the remainder for the parents to care for. In 3 days about 98% of the eggs hatched and the parents took excellent care of them. Once the tiny fry were free swimming, they schooled tightly but were very shy like their parents. Those hatched separately were especially shy, and when they ventured out, also schooled tightly. It was a challenge to get them to start feeding, as these fry do not pick around the bottom and plants to feed like most cichlid fry. Live food (baby brine shrimp, microworms etc) must move in front of them before they will grab it. The fry grew well and ate a wide variety of foods. In a tank with numbers of their own kind, older fry had vigorous appetites and were not shy at all!

I highly recommend *Cichlasoma boliviense* for those who enjoy a slight challenge and an attractive fish with a good disposition.