

# MALAWI BUTTERFLY CICHLID, *Aulonocara jacobfreibergi*

by Chase Klinesteker SWAM, Jan-Feb 2009



Young Malawi Butterfly Cichlids, developing male in center

## DESCRIPTION

The Malawi Butterfly Cichlid is one of the most colorful and striking African Cichlids I have ever kept. It was described by Johnson in 1974 and is also called the Fairy Cichlid. With brilliant white in the dorsal fin, neon blue on the face and body, and orange in all the fins and part of the body, it is truly an outstanding fish. To top it off, this fish has long flowing fins with a deeply forked tail and extra long ventral fins. The male has 9 or 10 dark vertical stripes on his body. The dorsal and anal fins are long, flowing, and with pointed extensions, especially in more mature males. The fish I am describing is *Aulonocara jacobfreibergi* "Eureka Red", a hybrid. Several native populations of this fish exist endemic to Lake Malawi with varying amounts of brilliant reds, blues, oranges, and yellows. *Jacobfreibergi* males differ from other *Aulonocara* males in that they have the brilliant white dorsal and tail fin margins. The orange and blue populations mostly come from the southern part of the lake, and the yellow from the north. It is recommended to keep each population separate and label them accurately. All *Aulonocara* females and juveniles are very similar and cannot be told apart, with brown vertical stripes on a light brown background. Males begin to color up at 2-3 inches and get their full color by 3-4 inches.

Male *jacobfreibergi* can get to over 7 inches, which makes it one of the largest of the peacocks. Females are considerably smaller, and due to the males' aggressiveness, it is recommended to put 4 or 5 females with each male along with caves and hiding places for them. 2 males will not get along in an aquarium unless it is very large. Sub-dominant smaller males as they develop will often keep drab coloration and short fins to appear as a female, but the dominant male will eventually root them out of his harem! They like hard alkaline water around 76-82 degrees and will eat just about anything. Since their diet in Nature is mostly insect larva and crustaceans, they need more protein than many mbuna. The tank setup should be as large as possible with many rocks and caves.

## BREEDING

Spawning usually takes place in a cave if available. Females will begin spawning at about 2 ½ inches and males about 1 inch longer. It is a maternal mouthbrooder but is not overly prolific. First spawns may be only 5 or 6 fry, although full sized females may hold 50 or more. I have had females swallow their eggs several times for no apparent reason. The eggs hatch in 12 days but they may hold 3 or more weeks and the females can look quite wasted. I think it is best to isolate the females and then remove the fry after about 2 weeks to reduce the stress on the female. The fry are wigglers at that stage but will survive just fine if put in an aerated gallon jar until free swimming. The fry are quite slow growing. It is one of the most popular of the African peacock cichlids. Adult males are often sold in stores and on the internet for over \$60. probably because of their outstanding beauty, low fecundity, slow growth, and necessity to keep males in separate tanks.

I highly recommend *Alunocara jacobfreibergi* because of its' great beauty and different color populations available.