

NOSY-BE CICHLID, *Ptychochromis oligacanthus*

by Chase Klinesteker SWAM, Nov-Dec 2006



Nosy-Be Cichlid Photo by Darrell Ullisch

DESCRIPTION

Ptychochromis oligacanthus var. *nossibeensis* or “Nossie” is a Madagascar cichlid that is one ptough *Ptychochromis*! You might think a fish this aggressive would never become endangered, but it is, and it is rarely kept by aquarists. It comes from the NW tip of Madagascar on the island of Nosy-Be in Lake Pambialo. Other names used are Juba Cichlid, *Tilapia oligacanthus*, and Tsipoy cichlid. It is quite attractive and can have an immense variation in color. The sides can be slate grey to black/purple with scattered blue and silver flecks. Lateral barring, blue lips and black fins can be present at different times and the males can have deep red highlights in their fins during spawning. Also, the male can have a yellow border to the dorsal fin and some yellow scattered in the fleck scale pattern on the sides. This is a colorful fish and truly chameleon-like.

I first learned of its toughness when I purchased one pair at a SWAMAS auction. The male had survived an attack on his tail that had left it permanently disfigured, but he was doing fine. The female was about half the size of the male and he beat up on her relentlessly, so I had to condition her in a separate tank with other similar sized cichlids. They also have a reputation of being tough to breed and raise. This species presented a good challenge, which I enjoy.

Male “Nossies” maximum size is 7-10 inches, but they will breed about half that size. Females seem to be quite a bit smaller than males, and this size discrepancy seems to show up even in young fry. It is recommended that adults be kept in groups of 5 or more to decrease aggressiveness. They will eat a variety of foods and can truly be gluttons. They are substrate spawners but also will lay eggs on glass or rocks. PH range about 7-8 is good and they can also handle brackish water. 75 to 86 degrees in temperature works well for them.

BREEDING

To breed them, the female was fed heavily on beef heart and flake food until she fattened up and her breeding tube started to drop. Then a 20 gallon long aquarium was prepared with 2 clay pots, one open and the other with a hole just large enough for the female to escape the male. Plastic plants were used for cover and a sponge filter for filtration. The temperature was about 82 degrees. Soon breeding behavior commenced and the male became very dark in color. About 200 eggs were laid inside the open pot and I removed about 1/3 of them with a “siphon-on-a-stick” to insure success, yet give the parents a chance to raise fry. They all fungused and were infertile! The male was very hard on the female so the removing, conditioning, and setup process was repeated.

This time was successful although the hatch in 4 days was only about 40%. The pair seemed to be good parents, yet in 2 days they ended up eating the fry, and I was glad some eggs had been removed from the spawn. When the tiny fry became free-swimming they gathered in the current around the sponge filter and would not pick around at the bottom and sides of the tank as most cichlid fry do. Some of them died of starvation before I figured out they need food to move constantly in front of them before they will eat, similar to Discus and Uaru fry.

Raising the fry proved a challenge also. Although they take baby brine shrimp when free-swimming, they are slow-growing and extremely shy. At over 2 months old they are only about ¼ inch long. They hide in a clump of plants and will only come out when live baby brine shrimp is added to the tank. They still were not eating dry food, either at the surface or from the bottom.

Ptychochromis oligacanthus nossibeensis is a rare, colorful, and endangered fish from Madagascar that I would recommend for anyone looking for a challenge as well as species maintainance in the hobby.