PYGMY LEOPARD CATFISH, Synodontis lucipinnis

By Chase Klinesteker SWAM Nov-Dec 2015

Female. Male Pygmy Leopard Catfish

DESCRIPTION

The Pygmy Leopard Catfish or False Cuckoo Synodontis is very peaceful, attractive, and a good scavenger. They can be confused with Synodontis multipunctatus, Synodontis petricola, or others since there are over 100 species of Synodontis catfishes. Although Synodontis petricola was the name used for this fish in the past, the true S. petricola are rarely seen in the hobby with S. lucipinnis often labeled as S. petricola. They come from north Lake Tanganyika in Africa and prefer hard, alkaline water and temperatures 75 to 82 degrees. Maximum size is about 3.5 inches, although they can breed at about half that. Care must be taken in handling this fish as it has sharp spines that can get caught in the net or injure the aquarist. It is mostly a night feeder, but eats just about any food, including fish small enough to fit in its mouth! Blackworms, frozen brine shrimp, snails, daphnia, flake foods, pellets, and much more are taken with gusto. Sharp gravel can be hard on their barbels, so fine sand or bare tank bottoms are recommended. They need caves and rocks to hide in and when comfortable will also come out to feed during the day. They are compatible with many species of African and South American fishes as they do not bother them and demand respect with those sharp spines! Males are slimmer and lighter in color than females. The dark spots and white fin edging result in a very attractive and popular fish.

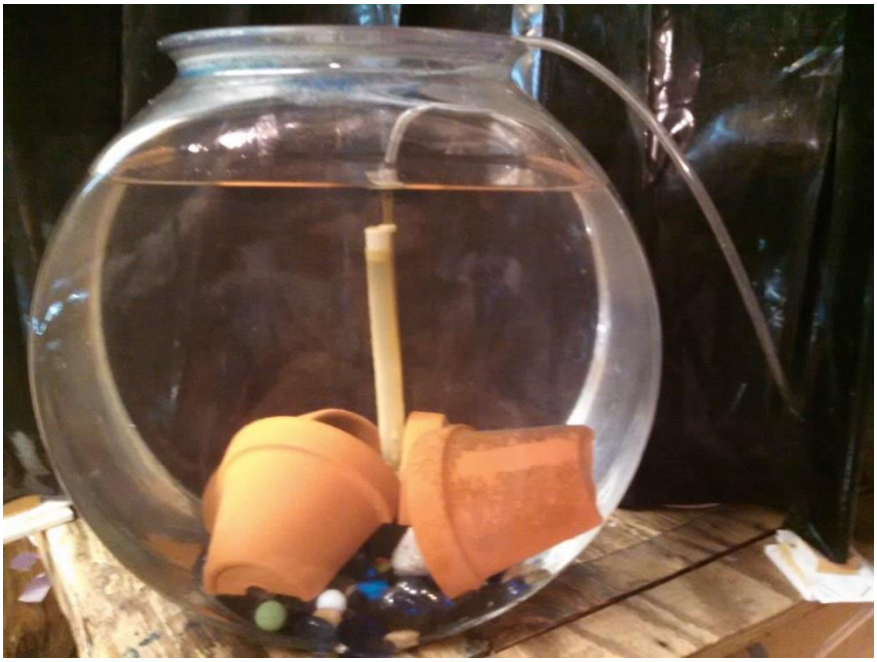
SPAWNING

Synodontis lucipinnis catfish will scatter eggs in and around rocks. I conditioned the male and female in separate tanks until the female was round and full of eggs. The spawning tank was a 2 ½ gallon glass drum bowl with glass marbles on the bottom, some limestone rocks for hardness, and clay pots cut in half for “caves”. A sponge filter with lots of air kept the water oxygenated and the temperature was about 78

degrees. The male was introduced and allowed to acclimate for 2 days, then the female was added. Around 200 eggs were found the next day, protected in the marbles from the hungry parents. After removing the parents, I siphoned half the eggs out, rinsed them off, and placed them in fresh tapwater with a bubbler and methylene blue. I also added methylene blue to the spawning bowl. Both containers had about a 70% hatch rate.

RAISING FRY

It was about 4 days before the fry began swimming around, searching for food on the bottom. The fry were very small, transparent, and would not take newly hatched brine shrimp at first and I didn't have microworms at the time, so I placed them in a 20 gallon tank with lots of snails and mulm on the bottom. This seemed to supply the tiny microorganisms for them to eat and in 2 days they were taking baby brine. They will hide from light (thick clumps of Anubius nana provide great hiding), but when baby brine shrimp are added, they all come out and scoot all over the bottom hunting them. The fry are slow growers but need to be fed at least 2-3 times per day. Even at that, there is a size discrepancy and the smaller ones will disappear. The fry are sensitive to nitrates and need frequent water changes. Even though it is fairly easy to breed, prices for the Pigmy Leopard Catfish remain high due to its slow growth and challenge to raise.



Breeding setup for Pigmy Leopard Catfish