

PELMATOCHROMIS BUETTIKOFERI: A CASE OF MISTAKEN IDENTITY

by Chase Klinesteker SWAM, Nov-Dec 2009



Mated pair of *P. buettikoferi*

DESCRIPTION

One of the meanest African cichlids kept in the hobby is *Tilapia buttikoferi*. It has a deserved reputation of being very nasty, not just to dominate, but to kill! It is known throughout the hobby as simply “Buttikoferi” (spelling can vary), and most aquarists avoid it like the Plague. Enter the picture: **Pelmatochromis buettikoferi** (Steindachner, 1894). This fish is quite mild mannered for an African cichlid, and is very colorful, with iridescent golden horizontal striping on the body, golden face and fins, and large iridescent blue eyes. It can be a truly gorgeous fish, yet whenever the “buettikoferi” name is heard, no one wants to touch it! It is seldom seen in the hobby, maybe because of its’ name. Darrell Ullisch gave me some fry, saying that they were difficult to get and rarely bred, so naturally, I accepted the challenge! I looked this species up on the Internet and could find only a few references, and poor pictures. Darrell suggested naming this fish the “Golden Congo Cichlid”, which describes it well, and I agreed.

BREEDING

Pelmatochromis buettikoferi is a West African riverine fish that may get up to 10 inches, although it will spawn at around 2-3 inches. Normally, females have as much color as males, but they are usually smaller and have less extension on the anal and dorsal fins. During breeding, however, the male becomes darker with more intense color and the female becomes more silvery. There is a hint of dark vertical striping at this time in the male also. They are an open substrate spawner, preferring to lay eggs on the top of a flowerpot or a flat clay tile. They do well in medium hard water, PH 7.8, and temperatures 75-80 degrees. They eat just about anything, including pellets, flake food, frozen brine shrimp, and live foods, but don’t seem to gorge themselves as some cichlids do. The female does not fill up much with eggs before spawning, and only laid 75-100 eggs at first, so they are not terribly prolific. The pair first spawned in a community tank and they were excellent parents protecting the eggs. For the next spawn I decided to give them more privacy and removed the other

fish---and holy hell broke loose! The male beat up on the female so bad that her fins were tattered and she lost an eye before I noticed. However, the story has a happy ending. After I removed the female, she recovered quickly and later when reintroduced in a community situation, resumed spawning with the male successfully. She had remarkable peripheral vision for only one eye and even was a little bit of a bully to some fish. Just make sure there are places for the female to retreat to after the eggs are removed.

EGG AND FRY CARE

Usually I will remove the small amber eggs after they are laid with a siphon on a stick. They are rinsed off, placed in a gallon jar with conditioned tapwater and 2 or 3 drops of methylene blue, and aereated. The eggs hatch in about 3 days. The fertility rate of the eggs was not high, so it is wise to rinse out and separate the infertile eggs at least once before they hatch so the water won't foul and destroy all of them. This is done by swirling the eggs in a pan. The fertile eggs will be denser, clear, and stay on the bottom in the center where they can be picked up with an eye dropper or baster. Infertile eggs are lighter in weight, dark blue, and can be poured off. Care must be taken to rinse off the fry after they hatch, since the eggshells can pollute the water and kill the fry also. The fry are quite small but will take newly hatched brine shrimp as a first food. Growth is slow, but after a month or 2, the fry can be quite attractive. They have silvery sides with a hint of golden, a small black "bluegill" spot, and a large black round spot in the upper portion of the posterior body. These spots will remain until the fish nears maturity in 6-8 months, when they disappear in both sexes as the golden striping takes over.

Don't let the "buettikoferi" name fool you and make you miss out. *Pelmatochromis buettikoferi*, the "Golden Congo Cichlid", is a truly beautiful and compatible fish, well worth spreading around the hobby!



Young *P. buettikoferi* have entirely different markings and coloration