

CICHLIDAE

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Pacific Coast Cichlid Association

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- Photo from Cameroon Tourist Bureau

Back Cover: *Steatocranus tinanti* - Photo by Ted Judy

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The Word is “Mulm”...

Well, after my tirade last issue, I still am not getting any articles. Threatening to move out of the area didn't work! Speaking of work, I did get a job locally so things are going well and I still will be the Auction Chair, Membership Chair, BAP Chair, and *Cichlidae communiqué* Editor and publisher for the PCCA. Maybe I should have taken that job in New Mexico!!!

I forced Kevin Plazak to write an article (OK, he offered) so the first article is about habitat, and how you may need to change your tank so the fish will spawn.

Pam Chin (I never have to force her to write and she is always early with her columns), follows up with a very lengthy *Ask Pam*, and a fairly short *Cichlids in the News*.

This month we have Dick Au speaking on Angelfish. Did you know that Angelfish are the number one selling cichlid in the US? I didn't either because when I ran Mainly Cichlids, I could never sell them. Very strange. So we all should show up on Saturday to hear what Dick has to say about Angelfish.

- Jim



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Habitat

By Kevin Plazak

When looking at a book or web site while dreaming about seeing a type of fish that you would love to see in your home aquarium -- the first thought that *doesn't* pop into an aquarists head is "I wonder what the habitat is like"? Seriously -- do you really need to know the color of the water at 5 pm when the rain is starting to come down? Do you need to know the ambient temperature fluctuation during the day in the summer and winter? Do you need to know what species of bugs live in the habitat with the fish?

I'm going to go with a qualified "Yes". I qualify it because I have never been anywhere that cichlids live natively (other than *Herichthys cyanoguttatum* in Texas) and I have bred a lot of species of cichlid. But having visited San Jose recently I got to talking with Chuck Rambo and he dropped an article on me about how to ID the various species of *Teleogramma*. Who does that? I was smiling a lot on the inside that someone may actually take this hobby to heart as



Steatocranus casuarius

Photo: Sam Borstein

much as I do but playing very cool on the outside. Well, as cool as a fish geek can be anyway.

And then he proceeded to tell me about how the breeding cycle works for *Steatocranus casuarius* and *Steatocranus gibbiceps*. It's a neat story if you are interested. If you aren't interested, skip down a bit... They live in the same habitat and they don't hybridize. In fact, when you get Buffalo Heads in from the wild, there are frequently *S. gibbiceps* in the mix. So -- two fish, same genus, same basic breeding style -- why don't they hybridize? The habitat keeps them from hybridizing -- more or less. See, a breeding cichlid female has to put on a bit of weight to make some eggs. In order to do this she must eat. In order for her to eat, her favorite (and therefore staple) food must be readily available as well as accessible. Buffalo Heads like algae and *S. gibbiceps* likes snails. So the timeline roughly looks like:

Algae ---> Female Buffalo Heads get Fat ---> Baby Buffalo Heads ---> Snails start in on the algae too ---> Female *S. gibbiceps* gets fat ---> Baby *S. gibbiceps*... It's that habitat options keeping the fish from hybridizing.



Steatocranus gibbiceps

Photo: Unknown

There is a whole lot more to habitat than the food. The food is a good way to sort out how to breed something that just doesn't seem to be interested in breeding for you. Species that live in fast moving water will use the energy that they have for swimming in a strong current to beat the tar out of one another if they are given no other outlet for their energy. Just because the fish doesn't need to swim into a current doesn't mean that it is not still built to use energy at a rate

consistent with that of a fish living in strong current. *Steatocranus* (yes -- I know, using a lot of the same example) *tinanti* lives in the same habitat as the fish noted above BUT they will live in the high current part of the habitat while the others live further out of the current. In the aquarium, *S. tinanti* can be hell on wheels chasing down its own species and terrorizing them without some decent outlet for their aggression. A power head goes a long way to keeping the peace -- and knowing the habitat will help lead you to a solution.

Do the fish like to breed in a cave, a mud tube, among plants, in a sand pit, between leaves stacked on the bottom of the pool, in the water column... these things will help solve issues. If a fish breeds in a mud tube like *Hypsophrys nicaraguensis* or *Triglachromis oostigma* you may find breeding the fish very difficult without that information. *H. nicaraguensis* has non-adhesive eggs that need to be laid in a bowl of sorts. The bottom of a mud tube will allow that but how will you sort out what to use in your home aquarium without knowing they need to borrow the hole from another species that makes those holes in their native habitat? You may not need to buy imported Central American mud for the fish but making sure there is a bowl in a cave available might be the trick...

You might be asking "Convicts breed in the bag on the way to the auction -- habitat isn't important for all cichlids, is it"? Well, no. Knowing the habitat of a Convict is probably not critical -- unless you can't breed them. Then knowing that the pH should be above 7.0 and they like tropical waters would be helpful. That doesn't mean they won't breed in a pH of 6.0 at 68 F -- but if you are struggling with a fish, knowing a bit about its native biology will help you a lot. And the point of this article is that foreknowledge of what you are in for when acquiring a fish can go a long way to the success of your hobby. Trying to breed a fish that prefers soft water in San Jose tap water might be a stretch. Conversely, keeping a stockpile of hard water fish might just do you well if you like to work with the water your house provides naturally. Your home habitat matters too...

The important take away point of this blathering is knowing your fish well will help you to succeed with your fish. Proactively researching a fish and building an appropriate habitat in your home will go a long way to enjoying your fish a lot more. And putting that energy into the fishes needs will reward you with behavior that will sometimes really surprise you. Since our primary goal in keeping a fish is getting to see what they are up to -- allowing them the opportunity to do as many of the things they would do in the wild will give you a window into their world. And isn't that what we are really doing here? Building little remote windows to the world thousands of mile away?

Good luck!

Ask Pam #100

By Pam Chin
Pam@cichlidae.com

This is the 100th installment of Ask Pam! That is 16 years of questions! A big thank you to everyone for your continued support and I must also thank my writing mentor; Kurt Zadnik who came up with the idea of a continuing column that would help fill up each issue of the Cichlidae Communiqué. I must also thank Juan Miguel Artigas Azaz who took a little column called Ask Pam and added it to the Cichlid Room Companion which has evolved into the most concise and preeminent cichlid site on the world wide web (www.cichlidae.com). I am so proud to be a part of it!



Hello Pam,

I have a 95.5-gallon tank, 63"x14"x25". The filters are two Fluval 405 external canisters. Water ph is 7. I've set up a Central American biotope with sand/gravel mix, river stones, some Val and Anubis plants and bogwood roots forming caves. I do 50% weekly water changes. I'm interested in keeping small Central American species (around six inches). My current stock is:

- (2) firemouths, m 4"/f 3" (bonded but no spawning yet)*
- (3) rainbow cichlids, 1m 2"/2 fm 1.5"*
- (4) green swordtails, 2m 3.5"/2 fm 3"*

I just purchased online a breeding pair of sajicas, 3-4". Do you think I will be successful with this mix? Am I overcrowded once they max out in size? I've had no aggression problems yet, but I haven't received the sajicas yet. All my research has said these fish should co-exist peacefully. What are your thoughts?

I also have two Herichthys deppi at 2 - 2.5", unknown sex, in a 16-gallon tank. What's their max size? I've read anywhere from 5" to 10". I have not found much information on them, but have read they are not as aggressive as other Herichthys sp., could they be placed in the 95-gallon tank as well? I know they will out grow their current tank and I will probably trade them to the lfs if they don't work out.

Thanks in advance for your input.

Bacon

Hi Bacon,

That sounds like a nice tank! It's really hard to say what will happen when you add the pair of *sajica's* to the mix. Most of these young centrals are sexually mature at less than 12 months old. Long before they reach their larger sizes. The best scenario would be if the *sajica's* claim a corner of the tank, and then that leaves more area for your other fish. To help insure that happens, you may want to make some caves, flowerpots or the popular spawning caves at the ends of your tank. The last thing you want is for them to pick a cave right in the middle of the tank, where they won't let fish by and the rest of your fish are stuck in the ends of the tank. Make sure you do a major water change and rearrange your caves when you add the pair to the tank. Keep an eye on it for a few days and make sure no one is getting trashed.

Good luck, with those *sajica's* they are fun to work with! Looks like you have some other nice stuff coming up to, I love the fire-mouth's and the *Herotilapia multispinosa*. I think the *deppi* are going to get larger, 8 "+ but are billed as peaceful. You might want



Cryptoheros sajica Pair

Photo by Daniel Spielman

to try some nicaraguensis or neets would be fun, as well as anything else *Herichthys* or *Thorichthys*.

Hi Pam,

I have several questions kindly waiting for your answers.

*First of all I have (4) *Vieja argentea* and (2) *salvini* in my 500-Litre tank. The *salvini* are about 3 inches long and *argentea* are 5-6 inches long. I'm quite sure about the sexes of my *salvini*s but having some problem with genders of *argentea*'s. There are (4) of them but all of them seem to be single individuals, I still can't get them to show any courting or pairing off behaviors. At what length will they breed and how can I know for sure the sex of the *argentea*'s?*

*Thank you for your precious time.
Greetings from Estambul*

Hi Salem,

Sounds like a nice tank! *Vieja argentea* is really difficult to sex. It is not the size of the fish but their age that is used to determine sexual maturity. They are probably sexually mature at 12 - 16 months, and it sound like your fish would be at least that old. The only accurate way to sex them is to vent them, but it can be difficult if you don't know what you are looking for. You can use the typical cichlid clues, that males are going to be larger, females are going to smaller, males are going to have longer fins and more color, females are more demure, etc etc.

As long as everyone is getting along okay, I would not worry much about it, and just let nature take its course. *V. argentea* is more difficult to breed then most Central American cichlids, and so it make take some time. As your fish mature and get larger some of the more common traits of males will become more evident, such as the hump on their head and fin extensions.

It's a great looking fish and fun to work with, I'll have my fingers crossed for you!

Hi Pam,

I finally came to a conclusion that the cichlids that I am most interested in and like are indeed the... Predators Haps!! So my current set up is:

225-Gallon

(3) Red Empress- 1 Male 2 Females

(2) Nimbochromis venustus- 2 M

(3) Champsochromis caeruleus- 3 Females

(13) Blue Dolphin moorii

(6) Synodontis multipunctatus

Some of my questions:

How many more fish do you think that my tank would be able to hold? I know that Haps are the larger species and require a lot of room. Would I be able to add predator haps to this set up? And if yes could they just be male or could I add females to the mix also I know by adding females that it would increase aggression, but would it be to the point where I would be losing fish or just the typical I chase you and you chase me? And if no, what would I have to do to be able to keep some predator haps? The only issue is possibly the blue dolphins, but in my current tank they dominate with my male Nimbochromis.

I was thinking that if you thought that it would be best to take my female Champs out I have another tank that they could rule and I could just keep Male P. Haps. That would be up to you.

And finally, do you have any personal experience with any of these species below. I have been reading up and not that much is said about them. All of the reading says they are just like every other predator Hap. Which I agree to with some extent, but I believe

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Dick Au

All About
Angelfish

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each fish has it's own unique personality to add to the mix. Just let me know if some are possible to add and would do well while others may be just a bad idea in the making.

Fossorochromis rostratus
Lichnochromis acuticeps
Protomelas spilonotus tanzania
Nimbochromis fuscotaeniatus
Aristochromis christyi
Tyrannochromis nigriventer
Tyrannochromis macrostoma
Dimidiochromis compressiceps
Buccochromis rhoadesii
Dimidiochromis strigatus
Placidochromis sp. "phenochilus tanzania"

I do not by any means want to add all of those to my tank either lol, I would like to add maybe two more species of fish to the tank and call it good.

Thanks so much for your help.
Steve



Fossorochromis rostratus

Photo: David Powell

Hi Steve,

Here is a little more information about these Haps, I think I have kept all these at one time or another. They are all very nice in their own ways!

Fossorochromis rostratus - Mellow - Sand sifter

Lichnochromis acuticeps - Mellow - sand sifter

Protomelas spilonotus tanzania - Mellow- Open water - *

Nimbochromis fuscotaeniatus - Predator - Open water – Fry eater

Aristochromis christyi - Predator - Open water – Will eat anything that will fit in mouth *

Tyrannochromis nigriverter - Predator - Open Water - His favorite food is Mbuna

Tyrannochromis macrostoma - Predator - Open Water - He likes anything that will fit in mouth



Protomelas spilonotus

Photo: Pam Chin

Dimidiochromis compressiceps - Predator - Likes to hang out in
Val along the shores and eats fry - Top Water

Buccochromis rhoadesii - Predator - likes to hunt on the sand *

Dimidiochromis strigatus - Predator - Open water - likes to hunt
everywhere

Placidochromis sp. "phenochilus tanzania" - Mellow - Sand sifter*

I always like to look at my tank and be able to see fish in all the areas of the water column, and try not to have too many fish competing for the same area. You have a large tank, so you need cichlids on the sand, you need cichlids that hang next to the rocks and you need open water cichlids. You have already made some great choices and so you just need to finish this tank off with some fun stuff. The *Champs* are really up in the air, you could always get some more and have a group, they stay towards the top of the water column and they look great in school. However, you could also move them out and put something else on the top water like *Dimidiochromis compressiceps*.

You have to decide if you are going to go all male or you need to do groups, they don't do well in pairs. You will have a high possibility of crossing. If you decide you do want groups and maybe you do want to try your hand at breeding, then you already have a group, and you move them out to a species only tank for breeding purposes, when you have some fry you throw them back in the main tank and you move out another group. That is the safest way to breed them. Hopefully if they do breed in the tank, the fry aren't going to last long, unless you are overfeeding your fish!

I put a star by the ones I like the best. You will have to eyeball your tank but I am thinking you have room for 12 fish, so two groups of 6 or 12 all males.

Hope this gives you some food for thought!



Champsochromis caeruleus

Photo: Pam Chin

Until Next time... Keep your fins up!

Questions and Comments are welcomed:

ASK PAM, P. O. Box 28145, San Jose, CA 95159-8145

Check out "Ask Pam" on the Web: www.cichlidae.com

Upcoming Programs

June 11, 2011

Dick Au—Angelfish

July 9, 2011

Dr. Ronald Coleman—Costa Rica?

August 10, 2011

Sarah Roberts—Petrochromis, Sand Sifters and
other odd ball cichlids

Cichlids In The News

By Pam Chin
pam@cichlidae.com

The calendar says its June!!!! But, the weather says it is still March! I should be complaining about the hot weather, but we have had none, I don't think we have had 5 days in a row without rain? I guess it is good, if you can't do anything outside it is the opportune time to play a little extra with your cichlids.

ACA-2010 is going to be in Silver Springs, Maryland, and June 21-24, 2011. The American Cichlid Association's annual convention is always a blast. It is a good place to expand your cichlid network and make cichlid friends for a lifetime. Right now if you join the ACA you can get a 1-year FREE electronic subscription to Tropical Fish Hobbyist. It should be quite a gathering of cichlid folks this year with Washington DC as a big draw. Check it out at the link below:

<http://www.ccadoesaca.com/>

FOTAS/CARES, the largest conservation themed convention ever organized for the aquarium hobby in North America will take place November 4th - 6th 2011 at the Airport Doubletree Hotel in beautiful San Antonio, Texas. The speaker line up is to die for! Ad Konings, Les Kaufman, Anton Lamboj, Paul Loiselle, Melanie Stiassny & Kathy England. Join conservation minded people and learn more about the status of habitats around the world.

Species Maintenance is where it's at. We must start maintaining

species, we can't continue to keep letting fish slide thru our hands never to be seen again. I am so excited for this event, and to be able to see fish experts that are rarely seen, like Kaufman & Stiassny. This 3-day event will also include a large Texas size auction on Sunday.

On to the Exchanges.... – slim pickens...

Rockin' In The Rift Lakes – By Michael A. Risko, Jr. – Fish Talk – February 2011 – Publication of the Atlanta Area Aquarium Association

Michael writes about *Pseudotropheus saulosi* in this months installment of "Rockin' In The Rift Lakes." He covers maintenance, diet and spawning of this fun Lake Malawi Mauna.

Caring For And Breeding the Buffalo Head – by Jules Birnbaum – Modern Aquarium – April 2011 – Publication of the Greater City Aquarium Society.

Jules shares his step-by-step experiences working with *Steatocranus casuarius*; a West African riverene. Maintenance and diet as well as breeding tips are included.



Mpanga Rocks, Malawi

Photo: Pam Chin

Local Cichlid Gets Rave Reviews!!!!!!! Cichlid Girls Rule!

Reprints

My Greedy Shellie Mind and “Lamprologus” similis by Lauren Manalastas – #178 Cichlidae Communiqué January/February 2010. Reprinted by **Fin Flap, February 2011, publication of the Eastern Iowa Aquarium Association.**

Reviews

Chitande Island, Lake Malawi by Pam Chin – #184 Cichlidae Communiqué January/February 2011. Reviewed by **Pisces Press**, March, 2011, and publication of the **Nassau County Aquarium Society**.

Chitande Island, Lake Malawi by Pam Chin – #184 Cichlidae Communiqué January/February 2011. Reviewed by **The Fin-Flap**, April, 2011, publication of the **Eastern Iowa Aquarium Society**.

Ask Pam #96 by Pam Chin – #183 Cichlidae Communiqué September/October 2010. Reviewed by **Modern Aquarium**, April 2011, publication of the **Greater City Aquarium Society**.

Ask Pam #97 by Pam Chin – #183 Cichlidae Communiqué November/December 2010. Reviewed by **Modern Aquarium**, April 2011, publication of the **Greater City Aquarium Society**.



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Some issues of *Cichlidae communique* are still available. Issues 11, 12, 15-120, and 121-171 are \$2.00. Issue 32 is \$3.00 and issues 62, 91 and 121 are \$5.00. Reprints of issues 11-15 are available in sets of five and are \$5.00 per set. Send your back issues order with check or money order to:

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