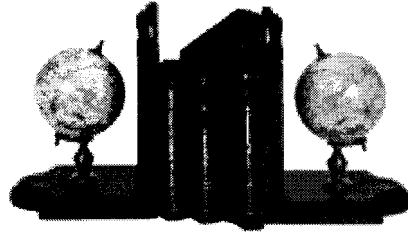




Jannette



Claudia

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Aquarian Minds Want To Know . . .

A Question and Answer column moderated by Claudia Dickinson and Jannette Ramirez

Pouring through books, perusing over the globe, conversing heartily with our peers in friendly debate, listening in rapt attention to the words of a distinguished lecturer in a packed auditorium, only to return to our own tanks to ponder further over our own fish and our hobby.....

Be it the first year, or the fortieth year, for as many years as we care for our aquatic inhabitants, there are as many questions as there are answers. With every corner turned, in our discovery of each new species of fish or plant and with every new spawn, our insatiable inquisitiveness only grows and flourishes without bounds on this, the journey of our hobby.



C.D.

This month's installment of "Aquarian Minds Want To Know..." was inspired by Bill Hudgens, member of the American Cichlid Association. Bill began writing to me regarding his mbuna tank in 2002, and we have continued our correspondence ever since. When it came time to stock Bill's tank, I deferred to Eric Hanneman, who offered valuable input in order to ensure that Bill would have a successful mbuna 'mix.' A warm and heartfelt thank you to Eric for taking the time to share his knowledge with us, and to Bill, whose e-mails I have enjoyed, and to both of you, for a friendship which I have come to value.



Hi Claudia,

I have set up my aquarium, run through the nitrite cycle, and am ready to purchase some Malawi cichlids. I live in a small town and the local pet store does not carry them. Do you have any suggestions where I can buy them? I don't see the species I want to get in the Trading Post. Should I wait until the (ACA) conference in Denver in July? Are there any websites where I can purchase them online at a decent price? Etc.

Thanks for the help.

Bill



Hi Bill!

I am so glad to hear that you are ready for your new Malawi cichlids! You have certainly taken the proper steps in your setup and research.

What species are you looking for? Very often, the members that list in the "Trading Post" offer more than they list. They may well have what you want. You can also place a "want ad" in the "TP." Jim Ellenberger will be happy to help you with this if you write him an e-mail. This would get the word out to all of our (ACA) Members. If you would like any help in speaking with Jim, please let me know.

There is no doubt that the Denver Convention is certain to hold many fabulous Malawi cichlids for you as well! I look forward to hearing from you Bill!

*Take Care!
Claudia*



Hi Claudia,

I was going to start out with a few *Labidochromis caeruleus* and *Pseudotropheus saulosi*. And then I saw the *P. demasoni* which I really like. But I am cautious about mixing the *L. caeruleus* with the *P. demasoni*. I also like the *P. acei*, *elongatus*, and *socolofi*, *L. fuelleborni* and *trewavasae*, and *Aulonocara jacobfreibergi* and *stuartgranti*. As a beginner I am totally confused which species will tolerate each other. I have a 90 gallon tank with plenty of filtration. So I would think that I could handle several species. Any advise?



P. demasoni

B



Hi Bill!

The majority of my tanks house South American, Madagascar and West African cichlids. Therefore, I would rather turn your Malawi cichlid community mix over for the expert evaluation of Eric Hanneman, who specializes in African Rift Lake species.

As a note from me, the Rift Lake experiences that I have had actually have been most extensive with such as *P. demasoni*, as well as *L. caeruleus*, and actually I would find that to be quite a good mix. You must keep in mind ~ lots of rockwork and crevices for individual territories and hiding places. I have not personally kept *Aulonocara*, although certainly tempted to for their beauty, but from my reading, if you are to keep males only, they are relatively docile as far as Malawi cichlids go and if there are no females present, may reside together in fair harmony. Eric is certainly the expert here and will know much further on this.

I will now ask Eric if he has thoughts for you on your first Malawi setup.

I look forward to hearing how you make out with this Bill!

*Take Care!
Claudia*




Bill-

I have kept Malawi cichlid community tanks in the past. Right now I keep 15 adult *baenschi*, 2 males and the rest females, in a 40 gallon, sort of a short 55. This group really produces fry, and the 2nd male, while chased a lot, gets to sneak in once in a while. Just a couple of half flower pots and 1/2" of aragonite sand for a substrate.

Community tanks work well, but put in more rocks and pieces of slate, making caves. Depending on your aesthetics, PVC pipe works great too, sized to fit the fish. Introduced to the tank at the same time, almost any of these fish from Malawi can get along. If there are females of each type, hybridization often does not occur, although there is always a chance, especially if there are two *Labidochromis* types, or two closely related peacocks, etc.

So depending on your goals, i.e., breeding and selling fry, or just a nice tank to look at and relax with, you can keep a colony of one species, or a tank of all males. In between these extremes, sometimes experimenting on your own is the way to go. Ounce for ounce, remember, *Melanochromis* can be mean.

*Cichlids Rule!
Eric*

 So I get 2 Penguin Powerhead 1140's for my 90 gallon mbuna tank. They are rated at 300 gallons per hour. I hooked them up to the undergravel filter and now the fish are swimming upstream. Is this TOO much water flow? What would you usually use for a 90 gallon tank?

B



Hi Bill!

Aside from special cases, I do not like to see my fish constantly 'fighting' the current. This will cause stress and over time, lead to difficulties.

What filters are you running aside from the undergravel?

Is the undergravel on reverse flow?

Take Care!

Claudia



Hi Claudia,

Thanks for responding so quickly - as usual.

The 2 powerheads do not have a reversal flow feature. So the undergravel filters are running the usual way. I am also running an Eheim 2026 canister filter, but it does not contribute to the turbulence. My guess is that I need to replace these powerheads with something smaller. What do you think?

B



Hi Bill!

Usually, you can redirect the output of the powerheads. However, if they are just too strong for the water volume, the force is compounded, causing excessive turbulence.

Yes, I would try something less powerful.

Let me know how you make out!

Take Care!

Claudia



Hi Claudia,

I have my tank set up and am ready to stock it. So I could purchase fish through the Trading Post. Or should I wait until July and buy them at the auction in Denver. What can you tell me about the auction? Are there usually a lot of fish available? Do you think it would be better for me to wait until then?

Thanks,

Bill



Hi Bill!

I am so proud of you!!! I can't wait to see photos!!!

Both the Trading Post and the Convention will fill your needs perfectly.

As far as the availability of fish the entire weekend of the (ACA) Convention, including the auction, I just cannot say enough in favor of this, as you will find more beautiful cichlids here than you could ever imagine!!! You will more than likely come home with enough to fill several tanks!!! (!*) I know I always do!!!*

I think it is a matter of whether you can wait that long. What do you think?

I look forward to hearing!

Take Care!

Claudia



Claudia,

How do I need to adjust my tap water for Malawi cichlids. I have a pH of 7.6 and 145 mg/L CaCO₃.

Thanks,

Bill



Hi Bill!

Your Malawi cichlids are very adaptable and if need be, can and will adjust to the water coming out of your tap. However, they will be most comfortable, stress-free, and ready to procreate if you are to raise the pH to 8.2 ~ 8.4.

There are several very good Rift Lake Salt solutions on the market which, when mixed in with your water according to the amounts as directed on the package, will easily make the proper adjustments. In the March 2000, Vol VII, Number 3 issue of Modern Aquarium, Joe Ferdenzi recommends a combination of 1 tablespoon sodium chloride (such as table or marine salt), 1 teaspoon sodium bicarbonate (baking soda) and 1 teaspoon magnesium sulfate (epsom salts) per each five gallons of water. You will want to add either solution that you choose with each water change in order to ensure that the same chemistry is maintained.

You may also wish to add dolomite or crushed coral to either your filter media, or mix it into the substrate. This will buffer the water, holding your pH steady.

I hope all is well with you Bill!

Take Care!

Claudia



Claudia,

Hi! What has been your experience with undergravel filters and digging? I assume the mbuna will move the gravel and make the filter ineffective. If so, do you simply move the gravel back in place?

Thanks for the great advice, as usual.

Hope to see you in Denver.

B



Hi Bill!

Yes, many mbuna will move the gravel, making the filter ineffective.

One method of alleviating this difficulty with mbuna and undergravel filters is to place an egg crate over the undergravel and then pour the gravel on top of that. You have brought up one of several reasons for controversy over the use of undergravel filtration.

Yes, I can't wait to see you in Denver!

Take Care Bill!

Claudia

Bill's Reply Hi Claudia,

An eggcrate. Ah, how clever! And elegantly simple.

See you in Denver.

Bill

Eric Hanneman

Noted author, avid collector and eloquent speaker, Eric Hanneman is a respected leader in the aquarium hobby. Currently serving as Managing Editor of the American Cichlid Association's publication the "BB" ("Buntbarsche Bulletin"), Eric has a keen interest in the preservation of the environment of our cichlids. Eric maintains over 40 aquariums, with his focus on the cichlids of Central America and Africa, as well as a few livebearers, catfish, tetras and killifish. Having collected fish in Mexico, Belize, and Lake Tanganyika, Eric is a highly sought-after speaker and has spoken across the country on a wide range of topics, including maintenance, breeding and his extensive travels. Eric received his Ph.D. in Developmental Neurobiology from the University of Oregon in 1986 and has served on numerous aquarium society boards, including that role and many facets of the American Cichlid Association. We are fortunate to have the knowledge and concern for the conservation of our fish that Eric has to offer to our hobby.



Claudia Dickinson

Claudia Dickinson is well known to all of us here at the GCAS, but imagine what kind of a first impression she must make on a visitor as they watch her setting a festive table with a theme appropriate to the season. As she piles it high with goodies, and then prominently displays the door prize for the evening, they must be thinking "I wish she was a member of MY club!"

A slightly more serious side to her is revealed when she sets her sights on an item in the auction, and engages in some serious bidding, invariably emerging victorious. But it is not until they have returned home, put their feet up, and start to read Modern Aquarium, that her true multidimensional nature begins to reveal itself. This multiple award-winning author writes articles on a wide variety of topics such as conservation, youth in the hobby, visits to special events, the fish most special to her at the time, or one of several columns, which will inform and inspire her readers.



Claudia's energy knows no limits, and she is tireless in her dedication to aquarists as well as fish everywhere. A most conscientious and knowledgeable hobbyist, she is generous to a fault as she shares her experience, creativity and time with any and all who cross her path. She is active in countless aquarium organizations. A list of her friendships and associations would make up a veritable who's who of the most respected names in the aquarium hobby. The ACA (American Cichlid Association), in which she is a Life Member and Ambassador-at-Large, serves as a member of the Board of Trustees, a member of the "BB" Editorial Staff and as the Membership Coordinator, and its publication, the Buntbarsche Bulletin, are especially close to Claudia's heart. Her home is not large enough to accommodate all of the aquariums that she currently keeps, so she is having a separate house built just for them! We here at the GCAS are especially pleased and proud to have the opportunity to become inaugural members of the C.A.R.E.S. (Conservation, Awareness & Recognition Endangered Species) Preservation Program, which Claudia has designed and implemented. She has a national, as well as an international, reputation as an "ambassador extraordinaire" in every facet of the aquarium hobby, and is well-loved by all who are fortunate enough to make her acquaintance.