

CICHLID RAMBLINGS

Rick Borstein, GCCA Webmaster

Seems like ages have gone by since my last article. I would have completely forgotten this one, too, if Editor Mike hadn't sent a last minute email indicating that I had two days to submit something.

Road Trip

The weekend before Thanksgiving is the Ohio Cichlid Association's annual Cichlid Extravaganza, a convention, show, and auction much like the GCCA's own Cichlid Classic.

You can usually count on ten or twelve GCCA members to make the trip and "represent" us.

Not wanting to miss out on a great event, I packed the car with our luggage, coolers, fish bags, pumps, heaters and some fish to sell. My 16-year-old son Sam was given the keys to the minivan, a Garmin GPS and a few impassioned words (Try not to kill us!). Sam pointed the car towards Ohio, dutifully following the disembodied voice from the GPS, and the trip was proceeding uneventfully.

Somewhere in Indiana, my wife Sharon noticed a warning light on the dashboard. A warning light none of us had ever seen before. What did it mean?



TPMS

In retrospect, we probably should have figured it out, but the tiny three-eighths inch high light didn't immediately register with us.

My wife consulted the owner's manual. TPMS is "Tire Pressure Monitoring System." We pulled into the nearest service center and found we had two low tires. We refilled them and got back on the road.

Less than ten minutes later, with no service center in sight, the light came on again. We limped off the road into an Indiana State Highway maintenance center and added some Fix-a-Flat," but our tires were in need of professional help. This was a surprise because we had just purchased brand new tires a few weeks prior.

After mashing a few buttons on the GPS, we found a tire service center in the nearby city of Angola, Indiana. Angola is nothing like I expected. There were no signs of a recent famine or civil war. In fact, there was a Walmart and a Starbucks.

As luck would have it, the tire store was only about a couple hundred feet from a pet store! Sea Dwellers & Friends—located at 1205 N Wayne St—is a nice locally run shop. Sam and I got to chat with Assistant Manager and we bought a bunch of supplies. They had a huge TriMac in a display tank and fair prices.

Two hours later, our vehicle was fixed. For \$38, our valve stems were replaced. Apparently, National Tire and Battery which sold us our new tires put back in the old valve stems—a no no!

At the Ohio Extravaganza

Fish conventions are fun. There are interesting speakers, to be sure, but for me the best part is talking to other hobbyists and picking up some interesting fish. By wheeling and dealing, I brought home:

- F1 Lamprologus toae—the bigeye lamp. I have not seen this fish in the Chicago area in a long time.
- Tilapia buttikoferi—they're small now, but will be brutes in the future
- Tilapia mariae

I did attend one talk by Lee Newman, who is a Curator at the Vancouver Aquarium. Lee's talk on South American cichlids from a hobbyist's perspective was very interesting.

In the Fishroom

I'm sure our January meeting will have a lot of good BAP fish. I'll be bringing in three bags:

- Oreochromis esculentus is a Victorian basin tilapia that is nearly extinct in the wild. It is also known as the singidia tilapia. These maternal mouthbrooding fish are big—up to eight inches or so—but not aggressive. Spawns are huge in the hundreds. The babies grow fast!
- Pundamilia nyeri is an aggressive, maternal mouthbrooder from Lake Victoria. Males are spectacularly red and black. I kept these in a 75G with the esculentus which were many times their size.
- Chromidotilapia guntheri is a paternal mouthbrooder from West Africa. This was the first mouthbrooder I spawned where the Dad did all the work! Very interesting fish and terrific parents.

Play Sand for Substrate?

Always trying to get by on the cheap, I decided to use Play Sand as a substrate in my 125G set-up.

Guess what?

Not a great idea. It takes forever to wash it and after a week my tank water still isn't clear. Unfortunately, I really didn't have a choice since I haven't been able to find Red Flint Sand for the last month.

Classifieds...Help!

We recently began having a problem on our Classifieds system with spammers posting adult content. To combat this, all ads are individually approved before posting.

Since we get thirty to forty ads per day on our system, there is some work involved in reviewing and approving the ads.

I am looking for someone to act as Ad Admin to help approve ads. You'll need an internet connection, of course. The nice thing about the job is that you'll get to see all the new stuff before it is posted!

Interested? Contact me at borstein@yahoo.com or 847-634-2443.

I have added two new categories to the Classifieds—Live Plants and Mixed Lots.

GCCA Forum is Live and Going Strong

GCCA's new online forum is off to a great start. As of this writing on December 31, 2007, we have 1822 Posts in 165 Topics by 95 Members.

Special thanks to our volunteer Forum Admins Christ Karnuth, Radek Kowalski, and Sam Borstein.

Check it out at www.gcca.net.

Swap Meet Chair Needed

Running GCCA's website, Classifieds and Forums, is a lot of work. For that reason, I would like to find someone to take on the role of Swap Meet Chairman.

The job isn't particularly difficult and I will transition the role with training and support.

You'll need an internet connection and some basic computer skills to do the job. I do a lot of the planning on my PC, but you can do it all manually and be just as effective.

If you're interested, let me know at borstein@yahoo.com or 847-634-2443. 🐟

Tropical Fish Auction

27 January 2008

Registration @ 8:30am

Auction starts @ 10:00am, goes until everything is sold!

Sheraton Chicago Northwest, Arlington Heights, IL



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I've been thinking about going on a collecting trip for many years, but until recently I didn't have the opportunity. Of course, there is the cost associated and there are myriad other arrangements to be made.

Although I travel frequently for business, I've always envied the guys who could just walk into the unknown. People like Ariel Bornstein who walk through quicksand and meet witch doctors and the like. I've always wondered if I could "grow a pair" and go collecting somewhere wild. Then, about three weeks ago, my phone rang.

My boss called me. Apparently, our country manager for South Africa called our CEO and asked for someone to come speak at a conference for the largest law firms in Johannesburg. They didn't have anybody who knew the legal market and needed some help. Somehow, the request trickled down to me. "Could you fly out in three days?" asked my boss? Maybe, could I stay a couple of extra days? My boss said "I don't see why not." I quickly rearranged some meetings and booked my flight to Johannesburg.

Almost Out to Africa

While Johannesburg is extremely cosmopolitan—at least it sure looked that way in the Wikipedia entry!—I wondered if some outlying locations were within striking distance for a collecting trip.

I quickly placed a phone call to Dr. Gerhard Strömmer who is head of the Neotropical Studies program at University of Munich-Wurstberg. I had read some of Dr. Strömmer's papers and knew that he had collected in that area of the continent.

I miscalculated the time difference (I accidentally dialed him after 10PM!), but he was kind enough to take a call from a crazy American. Fortunately, he is friends with Dr. Anton Lamboj of Austria who I regularly correspond with. Name dropping is my specialty!

He offered to put me in touch with his "lansman" (aka countryman on the ground), a Rolph Mergen who studied cichlid fishes at the University of South Africa. I politely asked if I could get his email or phone number. "I'll do better than that!" said Dr. Strömmer. He called Rolph Mergen directly and conferenced him into our telephone conversation.

As it turned out, it was a good thing I had called Dr. Strömmer so late—it was only just 9 in the morning in Johannesburg and Rolph had just walked in his office door!

We chatted politely for a few minutes and as luck would have it Rolph and a couple of his students were going collecting just a couple days after I was to finish my presentation.

I couldn't believe my luck! Rolph warned me to get my inoculations before going. Malaria is a terrible problem in the South African countryside!

I spent a sleepless night trying to figure out how I would get everything done before flying out. Fortunately, I remembered that Bob Matthews (former GCCA President) had mentioned during one of his collecting talks that inoculations were often available cheaply at county health departments. The next afternoon, I walked into the Lake County Health Department office in the nearby hospital and got six painful injections. There were two for malaria alone.

The next day I packed all my collecting gear—I didn't have any so it didn't take long! I also made sure to take an extra set of batteries and charger for my Nikon D50 camera.

Flying High

I knew the flight would be long, but at least it was split into segments. First, there was the eight hour flight to Gatwick in the UK. I had a three hour layover which I spent drinking Jaeger Bombs and Whiskey Sours in the United Red Carpet Club.

On flights longer than eight hours, my company allows us to fly Business Class. I used some extra frequent flyer miles to upgrade to First Class. It was worth it as this was a fourteen hour flight.

The plane to South Africa was a British Air 777— one big plane. The first class seats on British Air aren't seats at all really! They are a lot like those really expensive massaging recliners they have at the Sharper Image store. There is kind of a hood/shade which offers privacy, a TV with sixteen different movies, thirty radio channels and a power plug for your laptop.

My seat-mate was a very attractive young blonde woman of perhaps twenty-five years. She was wearing expensive designer jeans and sunglasses and appeared to immediately fall asleep.

A couple hours later, I was working on retouching an image of *Pundamilia nyeri* "Ruti Island" in Photoshop when my seat-mate woke up, stretched and took off her sunglasses. She asked me what I was working on. I told her about my interest in the cichlid hobby. "Sicklids? Are they all that pretty?" she said looking at my screen. Well, sure, many of them are, you should get a few tanks! She laughed and said her travel schedule was way too crazy to have fish.

We chatted for a few more minutes, and then she went back to sleep. I looked at her for a bit and couldn't help but think that she looked really familiar.

I later found out from the flight attendant that my seat-mate was Jessica Simpson! Fortunately, I was able to get a picture of the two of us to prove that it really happened. She was really nice, too!



Eventually, I started to get a bit tired. I closed my eyes and tried to channel the spirits of the great cichlid collectors such as Uwe Romer, Ad Konings, Jeff Cardwell, and Anton Lamboj to bless my collecting quest. *We're not dead yet!* they replied in unison, ... *and you're annoying us while we're eating our supper. Leave us alone!*

I made a mental note to discontinue dabbling in the spirit world.

I burst out of my reverie as the wheels hit the tarmac in South Africa. I made it to the dark continent!

Johannesburg, at Last!

After clearing customs, I was met by a red jacketed guy (he looked like a bellman) holding up a sign with "Mr. Borstein" on it. In thickly accented English, he explained that he was my driver and would take me to my hotel.

The driver's said his name was John. He later explained that his real name was—and I'm probably not getting this right—Mitaynt. He explained that he was born in the countryside and that he and his family could not grow food since their only source of water—the nearby Ktango river, had been diverted for a hydroelectric dam. It had parched the land around his village and they could no longer grow sweet potatoes and okra, staples for that part of the world.

He had walked with his extended family to the city when he was nine. His three-year-old brother had been attacked by hyenas on the way, and he and his father had to beat the animals back with sticks. (He actually said "steeks from triss").

I tipped John well when we arrived and I noticed he dashed immediately into the hotel bar and poured himself a beer from the tap while the bartender wasn't looking. I guess you're not likely to be afraid of hotel security if you have "chased by hyenas" on your resume!

Let me tell you, the Four Seasons in Johannesburg is first rate and very luxurious. Even though it was only 4PM local time, I was exhausted from travelling and needed to sleep. I didn't wake up until 9AM the next day. I ordered room service— wild warthog sausage, potatoes and eggs—and worked on my presentation. My demo and talk went great that afternoon and my colleagues were very pleased that I had agreed to make the trip.

Our company employees in Johannesburg took me out to what they told me was the hottest new place in town— an Italian restaurant owned by Mario Batali, the guy on the Food Network. The Springbok ragout over homemade penne pasta was good! You won't find that on the menu at your local Italian place I'd bet!

Over dinner, I mentioned that I was going collecting for fishes while in the country. "Seeklitz? What is seeklitz?" my colleague Gern asked. As I shared my plans, they became increasingly convinced that I was off my rocker. They told me the countryside was dangerous and that "...stupid tourists go missing all of the time."

Ok, I'm not going to lie. That was sobering.

I had the next day off (Friday) and got to walk around the city which is *remarkable*, in a word. The colonial architecture in the inner circle of town stands in unique contrast to a great many huge, steel skyscrapers. Unfortunately, none of the museums were open since it was some sort of city holiday. Apparently some guy named Bjorn Skelsruud was an early city leader who organized a militia and turned back a huge stampede of wildebeests which were threatening the settlement. Hey, that's no weirder than Kasamir Pulasky Day!

Although the day was hot (over 90°F), I found enough cafes which were open. The local brew—Krelfarz, which roughly translates from the local dialect as "lion piss"—was remarkably tasty!

I made it an early night as the next day Rolph was going to pick me up at 6AM!

Where's the Land Rover?

I woke up early and dressed in lightweight Safari-type clothes. My wife had packed me about a gallon of sunscreen and insisted I wear a hat since I am fair and burn easily.

I was standing outside the hotel the next day fifteen minutes early just in case. A Mercedes drove up. Not a Mercedes SUV either, but a five passenger luxury sedan. Are you Rolph I asked? "Yes, that's me! Are you Rick?" He shook my hand and tossed my bag in the trunk of the car.

I don't think it immediately registered with me at the time that the trunk was empty and that Rolph was barefoot and wearing white linen pants and a leather vest.

We chit-chatted for thirty minutes or so while we drove on Highway A5, the main drag out of the city.

"Aren't you nervous?" he asked. I truthfully answered that I was very nervous and that the opportunity had happened very suddenly, but that I knew I had to seize it.

"I am very nervous, too," said Rolph, "I have never been part of such plannings."

He lit up a handrolled cigarette that smelled funny and inhaled deeply.

We drove on in silence for a few minutes.

I asked whether he thought it would be too hot to catch fish as the local weather had predicted a high temperature 100°F for the day. He looked confused. "Fish?" he said. Well, actually collect fish, you know what I mean. He looked even more confused. "How can you think of these things right now? Aren't you concerned for your family?" he asked. Now it was my turn to look confused.

Eventually I found out that I was supposed to be a Rinke—easily confused with "Rick" because of his thick accent, and that we were heading to a farm in Lúdsqual where I was to meet my birth father for the first time!

Yup! I had gotten in the wrong car with the wrong guy!

It took some time to convince *this* Rolph that I was not *Rinke*, no doubt because the funny-smelling cigarette actually was local—and very potent—marijuana!

By the time we made it back to the hotel, the real Rolph had already left. There was a message waiting for me at the front desk. Unfortunately, I didn't have a cell phone for Rolph either or any other way to reach him.

A Lesson Learned

Even though it was only a little after 8AM, I went into the hotel bar and ordered two shots of the local moonshine—Djemmo, which is brewed from the leaves of the Banyan tree—and cursed my luck.

Well, at least I would get a good story out of this for the next issue of the Chatter. Isn't that coming out on the first of April?



2008 Cichlid Classic May 23-25

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Many of you know that I travel for business. Every so often, I get the chance to hang out with other fish geeks. This is one of those times when I get ramble and see some fish!

Sacramento, California

When I think of Sacramento, I usually think of Pam Chin. I've visited her fish room before and it is amazing. So, I emailed Pam, but she told me she would be out of town. Rats! I didn't really know anybody else in Sacramento. Wait! I did!

Rich Birely was the Convention Chariman for last year's ACA Convention in Sacramento. My son, Sam, and I spent some time with him during the convention and liked him immediately.

Unfortunately, I didn't have contact information for Rich. Serendipitously, I received a copy of the SAS monthly publication in my email and found his phone number in the member directory. A day before leaving for California, I left him a message. Truthfully, I didn't expect to hear from him, but shortly after I arrived in Sacramento he called my mobile number and we were able to arrange to meet.

Local Shops

I picked up Rich from his job in my rental car and we visited a couple of local shops. California shops always seem to have unusual stuff at fair prices. For example, Chocolate Gouramis for \$3.99 each and about a dozen types of arrowanas. However, they also had a ton of oddly named hybrid cichlids like "Strawberry Severum".

You never know what you'll find. One shop had Bumblebee Suckermouth Catfish, which neither I nor Rich had ever seen before. They look like a Bumblebee Goby married a pleco!

After visiting the shops, we met his wife Laura for dinner. Laura brought along their gorgeous one-year-old daughter. It turns out their kid was conceived at the ACA Convention in Chicago!

That's dedication to the hobby ...

Rich's Farm

Rich lives about 35 miles outside of the city in the hills way out in the country—twisting, turning dirt roads with no streetlights! I was glad I brought my GPS or I never would have made it back to my hotel afterwards.

Rich makes his home on forty acres of mostly undeveloped land on the top of hill. There, I saw his horses and goats, and met a very friendly one-eyed dog. I made the mistake of asking how the dog became "monofocal" and heard a scary tale.

Rich and family were sitting on the porch when they heard a terrible howl from the dog. Poor "Russel the Wonder Dog" was bit in the eye by a rattlesnake! Rich was barely able to get the poor thing to the vet in time to save it.

A Big Fish House

Rich has a huge 40' by 50' fish house with about ninety tanks. I've seen big fishrooms before, but even so, this was impressive.



Besides fish, Rich is really into herps. He had a pet rattlesnake (eek!) and several huge monitor lizards. One of the monitors was over fifty pounds and all of them are aggressive. Rich fed and watered the animals while I was there. He had to use large aluminum stick with a forked end to push the animals back so that he could give them fresh water. Rich participates in a monitor rescue program, so some of these beasts are temporary residents.

Rich has a variety of fish and they are mostly cichlids. His favorite fish come from Lake Tanganyika. In fact, he is so taken with Tanganyikans, he visited the lake a few years ago on one of Ad Konings safaris.

I saw several Tanganyikan breeding groups including *Tropheus*, *Eretmodus*, *Cyathopharynx furcifer* and others.

He's bred some difficult tangs. For example, he had fry from *Neolamprologus nigriventris*, a fish that has confounded several GCCA members. He placed a pair in a 75-gallon tank filled nearly to the top with rock. One day he saw fry! Go figure ...

Rich showed me his breeding group of the Tanganyikan killifish, *Lamprichthys tanganyicae*. These aggressive killis can be good tankmates for cichlids. They are nice looking and I made a note to get some someday.



Water in California is expensive; even more so out in the desert foothills. The well on the property goes down 1200 feet and the water is actually not good for fish. His well supplies his home, but he trucks in water for his fish. Yes, his fish get better water than his family!

A Giant Indoor Pond



I was so busy checking out Rich's tanks, that I completely overlook a huge indoor pond hidden behind some racking. The pond is about forty feet long by ten feet wide and is filled with crazy-big fish! For example:

- ❖ Foot long *Nimbochromis linnii*
- ❖ Fourteen inch *Fossorochromis rostratus*
- ❖ *Boulengerochromis microlepis*
- ❖ *Oreochromis tanganicae*
- ❖ Two types of *Bathybates* over a foot long

He and his wife have to use a seine to get the fry out!

Final Thoughts

Rich Birely is one of the nicest guys in the hobby. He has several talks and would be a great speaker at a Classic!



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Summer is here and the pond is set up. Sometimes, it's hard to think about my fish room when it is so nice outside. Still, spring has turned into a bonanza in the fish room! I am totally out of fry space. I am approaching 150 species in our BAP Program and I still get a kick from every new spawn.

Caquetaia spectabile

My *Caquetaia spectabile*, a South American basketmouth predator has finally spawned. Although these fish get over a foot, they are not very aggressive compared to big Central American cichlids. Ric Perez—an expert in tankbusters—pointed out to me that the mouth structure of this fish is not as strongly built as Red Devils and the like. Although I knew I had likely pairs from the group of ten which I originally purchased, no breeding ensued. I chalk it up to a couple of factors. Firstly, I think these fish need to be close to eighteen months old to breed. Secondly, I had too many fish in the group. I winnowed the group from ten to three and added some small *Tilapia mariae* as dithers.

I had heard that *Caquetaia spectabile* were not good parents and—so far—it's too soon to tell.

The pair did a poor job guarding their first spawn which were laid in a ten-inch flowerpot. After a couple of days, there were only thirty eggs left from a spawn that must have been in the two hundred range. I snatched out the huge flowerpot and artificially hatched them—pot and all—in a five gallon bucket.

My son Sam took on the fish after I got my first batch of fry free-swimming. The parents did a better job for him. They successfully moved about seventy-five wrigglers to a terracotta vase which was sealed on one end. However, after the fry were free-swimming, the parents didn't seem to know what to do.

I helped Sam siphon out the survivors and—voilà!—he had a spawn without nearly as much work as I put into these fish! I don't mind because I get just as many "hand me down" fish from him and his eight tanks on the other side of the basement.

The tiny fry don't grow much the first couple of weeks, but after that they take off.

Aequidens pulcher

I caught my Blue Acara—*Aequidens pulcher*—in the act of spawning a few weeks ago. I kept these fish in a 90-gallon tank with some much larger *Vieja breidhori*. The pair did their best to defend their spawn, but my faith in them was limited, so I hatched the fry artificially. The latin “pulcher” means beautiful and that might be a stretch except for when they are spawning. The male’s dorsal gets very blue. Otherwise, it looks like most other *Aequidens*. I did find them to be more aggressive than other *Aequidens*, but that might have been something they developed when kept with more aggressive tankmates.

Caudo Punks!

At the March Swap Meet, I purchased six young *Neolamprologus caudopunctatus* from fellow GCCA member Ray Slover. I had not been successful with this Tanganyikan in the past. On two previous occasions, they killed each other in the small five or ten-gallon tank where I housed them. This time, I placed the fish in a 20-gallon long tank containing a sand bottom and heavily forested with Temple plants. I added several shells—also from Ray. The tank also contained several Blue Tail Goodeids as dithers.

With the limited sightlines because of the heavy plantings, the fish did very well over the next few months. I noticed some of the fish hover near the shells, but not spawn in them. I added a very small two-inch terracotta cave which a pair eventually selected and spawning ensued. Peering into the tiny pot with a flashlight, I saw about fifteen to twenty eggs and free-swimming fry about eight days later. I left the fry in the tank and fed live baby brine, but eventually they all disappeared.

Fortunately, a couple of weeks later, I had two pairs spawn—the original pair (terracotta cave) and a smaller pair in a shell. I siphoned out about a dozen fry after they were free-swimming and have them growing out in a five-gallon tank.

Curiously, the fry hardly ever move. Their entire modus operandi seems to be to sit on the bottom and blend in. Like many Tanganyikans, they grow sloooow!

A Red Tail Sheller from Lake Victoria

It’s great to have a son who is not only a cichlid nut but works at a pet shop! My Fathers Day gift from son Sam was a trio of *Platytaeniodus* sp. “Red Tail Sheller”. Like many Victorians, it is a precocious breeder and it wasn’t hard to get a nice spawn of twenty-two babies from the little two-inch female. The fry grow fast.

There is a nice write-up on this species by Victorian expert Greg Steeves if you’d like to learn more about it:

<http://www.cichlidae.com/section.php?n=ff&id=142>

I first met Greg at the Denver ACA Convention and he knows a ton about Victorian cichlids. Maybe we can get him to speak at our next Cichlid Classic.

An ACA Winning Fish ... from fry to spawn!

Protomelas spilnotus is a large Malawian mouthbrooder that has a confusing background. The Tanzanian variety which has a *Fish of the Month* profile on the GCCA website may be misidentified. The fish that won the 2005 ACA Convention “Best in Show” was Ron

Georgeone's Protomelas "silonotus tanzania" (insignus blue orange). This is a gorgeous fish. In fact, I liked it so much it became the "cover fish" for all of our materials for the 2006 convention we hosted in Chicago.

I obtained my fish about a year ago from our box swap with the Desert Fish Club. At a scant 1.5 inches, the male colored with blue flanks and impressive orange throat. I moved these fish into a 125 for growout and was recently rewarded with three-inch female holding. The eggs are huge and the female only had seven babies. At free-swimming, the babies are already one-half inch long and growing fast.

A Weird-looking Malawian Predator

Lichnochromis acuticeps is known as the Malawi Gar. This slender predator approaches a foot in length. Males are blue or blue barred—depending how they are feeling—and females are tan-gray with spots.

I obtained a group from GCCA member Mike Helford who always seems to have Malawi oddballs. Unfortunately, I didn't catch an outbreak of Ich in time and lost three out of the four fish I had leaving me with single female.

Luckily, my son Sam spotted a pair at King Coral Pet Shop and brought them home for me. The trio had an entire 90-gallon tank to themselves and in just a couple of weeks I found one of the females holding.

I let her hold for thirteen days and then stripped her of about fifty very large fry at the heads and tails stage. About a week later, the babies were free swimming and over half an inch long.

Aequidens sp. "Rio Inrida"

I obtained these fish—if memory serves—from fellow GCCA member Debbie Keeling. This fish is a bit of an enigma.

There's virtually nothing on the internet about this fish. From my internet research, I did discover that Rio Inrida is an Amazon tributary river in Columbia that is home to *Apistogramma inridae*. Curiously, I also found reference to a Rio Inrida in Ecuador where Altum angels are found with a nominal pH of 4.8! It is certainly possible that the river spans both countries since they share a common border.

Regardless, these fish grew and spawned for me in Chicago water. Like other members of the genus *Aequidens*, they are thick bodied fish. Males have a dark horizontal stripe and a golden sheen on the flank which extends into the tail. Females—when feeling frisky—have a dark, nearly checkerboard pattern. Compared to other *Aequidens* I have kept, these are not nearly as aggressive.

The pair spawned for me on a small piece of slate in the rear corner of a forty breeder. They turned out to be very good parents, raising their brood of about one hundred fry and defending them against other tankmate. The fry are very tiny and can just barely eat a freshly hatched baby brine shrimp. I had best results using micro-sized brine shrimp eggs which are about 30% smaller than Utah eggs.

Metriaclima patricki

According to Laif DeMaison of Old World, this interesting Malawian mbuna re-entered the hobby in 2004 many years after first being imported. The latest specimens were collected near Jalo Reef, although they are also found at Nkhomo Reef, Mbenji Island, Maleri Islands, and Chidunga Rocks according to this reference:

http://www.malawimayhem.com/articles_patricki.shtml

I had heard that this is a dwarf species, but other internet sources indicate that this species gets up over four inches. At any rate, I plopped these guys in my 125 and the female was holding shortly thereafter. The fry, I've noticed, are very shy, but growing well.

Out in the Pond

With a lot of fish, and not a place for them, I needed to free up some space. Spring did not spring early this year, and it took a long time to get the water temperature up to 70F. Once it got there, the two-inch specimens of *Amphilophus amarillo* went into the pond. This close relative of the Red Devil is a nicely colored fish with a yellow background and black bars. My son Sam's wild pair were the parents of the fry I grew up over the winter. They seem to be doing great in the pond. Within a week after putting them in, there was zero daphnia to be found!



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Yikes! Summer is almost over. That is depressing. In just a few short weeks I will have to break down my pond, which is a lot of work. Well, at least a few good things happened over the Summer.

Take that! I bred Rams!

Regular readers of this column have heard about my many travails breeding *Microgeophagus ramirezi*, more commonly known as Rams. Sure, I've had numerous spawns, but the babies always died. This has led to some ongoing commentary in my household, particularly from one son who shall remain nameless. However, his initials are SAM BORSTEIN.

In truth, Rams are not supposed to be all that hard to breed and I probably deserved the ribbing because I failed not once, but three times with this fish.

When Sam brought home a pair of Rams to breed for himself, the verbiage escalated. I had to defend my cichlid honor. The next week I had him bring me a pair from King Coral Pet Shop where he works.

Hey, they spawned for me two days later!

I raised the babies artificially by suspending them in a round glass fish bowl inside my 125. I added methylene blue and an air stone and had a good hatch.

The challenge with Rams is that the babies are really tiny, in fact too small to eat even the smallest baby brine shrimp. I decided to go the natural route by placing the forty or so babies into a 5-gallon tank filled nearly completely with Java Moss. The babies were able to take in some of the microscopic food from the plants and about three days later were able to eat San Francisco Bay Brand *artemia* nauplii, which are about one-third smaller than the Utah eggs I usually hatch.

About twenty or so survived and they grow slowly, but are approaching one-half inch.

I later found out that GCCA member Leonid Fliman had supplied the fish to King Coral. He has really nice Rams if you want to try some for yourself.

Other Stuff in the Fish Room

Things always slow down a bit over the Summer. I did have success with *Harpagochromis* sp. "Palisa Black Slick," a Victorian predator I obtained as fry from GCCA member Tom Christensen. When spawning, males get nearly completely black. Females, like many Victorians, are drab, but excellent holders. I have noticed that the predatory Victorians take a lot longer, and need to be a lot bigger before they will breed.

Today, I stripped a female *Dimidiochromis dimidiatus* of about fourteen fry. This uncommon fish is an elongated Malawian predator and a very fast swimmer. I obtained these beauties from GCCA Member Mike Helford who always seems to have unusual Malawians in his fish room.

A Visit to San Jose

I frequently travel to San Jose, and I always make it a point to hang out with my cichlid friends when I am there.

While in San Jose, I had dinner with Jim Ellenberger of Mainly Cichlids (www.mainlycichlids.com) and Chuck Rambo. I picked up some *Callochromis pleurospilus*, *Aequidens amazonarum*, *Metriaclima* "OB Mustard" and some *Mylochromis lateristriga* from Jim.

Besides fish, I also picked up an invertebrate ...

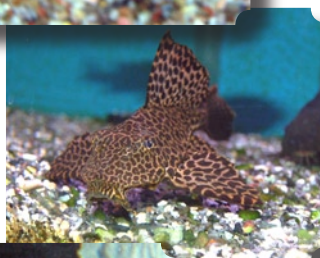
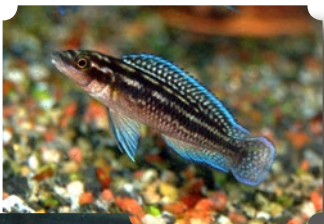
Carnivorous Snails

Many of us have a lot of trouble controlling Malaysian Livebearing snails. They multiple like crazy and plug up filters. If only there was natural way to control them ...

You know you've hit rock bottom in the hobby when you get excited about a snail.

Jim had recently ordered in some Killer Snails from a breeder in Holland. These "killer snails" were destined for Mr. Rambo's overrun tanks, but he was nice enough to give me one (they run about seven bucks each!) and I took the little beast home in a pill jar.

Killer snails—usually called Assassin Snails (*Anentome helena*) – are the natural predator of Malaysian Livebearing snails. For a snail, they are nice looking with alternating tan and dark brown bands. They are carnivorous and do not eat algae.



SOME OF THE FISH FOUND AT DAVE'S RARE AQUARIUM FISH

These snails are a bit of an internet phenomena right now. There is even a YouTube video of them at work:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vV1JechYgeo>

I put the assassin snail in an infested tank and it was interesting. I don't think the little guy had been fed in a while. After putting him in the tank, he immediately attacked one of the Malaysian Livebearing snails. Cool! They move faster than other snails, plowing through the sand at a good clip—at least for snail.

The killer snail has lance containing toxin which he injects into prey snails. Then, the little killer extracts the insides of the prey and eats it.

Awesome!

I named him Hercules.

Rock bottom, I know!

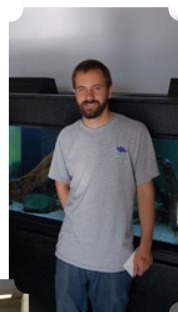
And, in San Antonio

San Antonio is home to the Hill Country Cichlid Club and Dave's Rare Aquarium Fish (www.davesfish.com). I met Dave Schumacher—the owner—at the Atlanta ACA Convention and he was nice enough to let me visit his shop/shipping facility.

Dave is a serious cichlid hobbyist and his shop shows it. All tanks are labeled with species and location/color variety—and, of course—I couldn't leave without buying some fish! I picked up some *Neolamprologus mustax*, some wild Texas cichlids, and a few fish for my son Sam including *Ctenochromis horei*.

The Hill Country Cichlid Club has a bit over fifty members. Hopefully, we can do a box swap with them in the future and get some of their great fish up to Chicago!

See you at the picnic!



CICHLID RAMBLINGS

Rick Borstein, GCCA Webmaster

Fall is here. With more time spent inside, I usually spend more time on my fish and spawning activities usually kick up a notch.

Vieja breidhori

Vieja breidhori is the type species for the *Vieja* complex, but you don't seem them around much. This relative of the Black Belt Cichlid, isn't very common in the hobby, so I was quick to snap up a few at the 2007 ACA Convention in Sacramento.

The 1-1/2 inch juveniles I purchased were placed in a 90G tank to grow out. Tankmates were a group of Blue Acara and some *Pungu maclareni*. Like other *Vieja* complex members, I expected them to:

- ❖ Grow fast
- ❖ Be mean
- ❖ Be good parents

I lost a couple of fish during this time, but overall I didn't have many issues. The fish ate well and looked great.

After about sixteen months, the largest male was about eight inches long and that was things started to get pretty nasty.

First, the Blue Acara started disappearing. I'm not sure if the *Vieja* got to them or if they did themselves in. Fortunately, the Blue Acaras had already spawned and I had fry.

Next, the dominant male killed off the sub-dominant males in short and spectacular order—fins shredded, scales stripped. Yikes.



About a week later, I observed the dominant male and the largest female acting "spawny". Members of the *Vieja* genus undergo striking color changes during spawning, with the female changing dress first. The top half of the fish becomes white/gray and the bottom half is black. The female laid about 150 eggs on a piece of terracotta tile that I had inclined against the back of the tank.

About five days after laying the eggs, the female moved the clutch to a new location. The pair dug several pits in the sand. At this point, the male changed color.

The pair keep the fry well-hidden, so I haven't seen them yet. With some luck, I can BAP them in January.

If this spawn doesn't work out, I will be concerned. Maintaining a pair bond with these large cichlids is challenging. The male can turn on the female at any time.

Why not Tilapia?

I admit it—I like *Tilapia*. You really should try the blackened version on a whole grain bun with a bit of chipotle mayo. Delicious!

I also like keeping *Tilapia* and recently had success spawning *Tilapia mariae*.

Tilapia get a bad rap in our hobby—deservedly—but that doesn't mean we shouldn't keep them. They can be aggressive, messy, and feral populations are a real problem around the world.

On the plus side, they grow fast, look nice, eat anything and are great parents. Even better, you can get the fry about to about an inch in just about six weeks! *Tilapia* are hard to kill and can survive beatings from larger tankmates— a great target fish for large cichlids. *Tilapia* always seem to manage to *just* get out of the way.

Tilapia eat anything, eat often and are always hungry. Most fish are quite shy once you move them to a new tank—not *Tilapia*! I recently netted out some young *Tilapia* and moved them into a new tank for grow out. I actually timed this—they were eating within twenty seconds! I am not making this up ...

I don't remember where I obtained my *Tilapia mariae*, but they were about 1-1/4 inches at the time. They grew to six-inch spawning size in about eight months. During the process, they were used as target fish for a large group of *Caquetia spectabilis*.

Tilapia mariae are attractive having a golden background with several dark vertical bars. During spawning, the background color intensifies, especially in the female. My pair laid about 100 eggs on a piece of terracotta tile. The eggs are quite large for a substrate spawning fish.

The eggs hatch in four days or so and the parents often move them to other locations in the tank. I observed the female moving the wrigglers into a terracotta tube. The large fry are robust and can immediately eat baby brine shrimp. I siphoned some off some fry for grow out in a ten-gallon tank. The two-day old fry were picking at flake food the next day.

Tilapia fry grow fast and you can really pound the food into them. You have to be careful with African fry which are easy to "pop" if you overfeed baby brine shrimp. No worries here— *Tilapia* will keep ringing the dinner bell! You can feed the babies until they look like marbles and they will efficiently convert that to fish flesh.

At three weeks, the fry develop the vertical stripes of the adults and look darn cute!

If you haven't tried keeping and breeding *Tilapia* now is the time to start. I'd suggest buying a group of six to eight juveniles and growing them up (which won't take long!). *Tilapia* are much easier to handle and breed before they reach full adult size which is in excess of a foot in many species. When big, they have huge spawns, and equally aggressive temperaments and appetites.

Sidebar

My son Sam pointed out an interesting fact about egg size in *Tilapia*. Mouthbrooding *Tilapia* (e.g. *Oreochromis*) have very small eggs. Substrate-spawning *Tilapia* have large eggs. It would be interesting to compare the egg size, but I would guess they would be pretty close.

