

Species Profile: *Apistogramma cacatuoides* - Cockatoo Dwarf

Apistogramma cacatuoides or Cockatoo Dwarf Cichlid, is a cave spawner native to the South America - Amazon basin. The climate is sub-tropical with temperatures in the mid 70's to 80's and native waters for this fish are pH of 5.5. I obtained three 2 inch long fish from aquabid.com . Males achieve a size of three inches, are larger in size, and have dramatically elongated rays in the dorsal fin. Females achieve a size of 2.5 inches and are smaller in size than males. At spawning time, they turn a very distinct dark yellow. In my particular situation, I obtained an aquarium strain Orange flash male and my female is wild caught.

The fish bred in a 10 gallon tank which contained no substrate and was planted with *Anubias barteri* . The tank was filtered by a sponge filter and had a pH of pH of 7.5. I performed weekly water changes equal to 15% of the tank volume. I used fluorescent lighting for a duration of 14 hours each day. I fed the fish brine shrimp flake, Tetramin cichlid flakes, as well as live brine shrimp.

When spawning, the orange color of the male intensifies. Females change to a bright yellow and the horizontal stripes turn a strong black as well. They can be bred as a pair or a harem with several females holding small territories. I provided caves for the females to seek refuge as well as to establish their spawning sites. The female normally guards the fry, while the male defends the wider territory. Fry are normally free-swimming in about a 3-5 days.

The pair laid approximately 30 eggs. After spawning, the female and male protected the spawn. The female will lead her fry around the tank to feed. She does the primary care of the young. The fry were a yellow-tan in

color and about 3/8 of an inch long.

The fry didn't require any special care on my part. I left them in the 10 gallon tank with the mother. The tank used sponge filter for filtration. After I noticed the female leading the fry around the tank, I moved the male to avoid any unnecessary deaths. I left the female to care for the young an additional week. I started the fry off on Cyclop-Eeze. After seven days I started feeding

crushed flake food. The fry grew extremely slowly.

This is an incredibly easy fish to induce to spawn. A lot of my research suggested that the pH of your water should be acidic; however, these fish will spawn in basic water. My water is about 7.5 pH. I also added some driftwood to lower the pH some. I also found these fish to be very interesting in brood care behavior. The mother exhibits

excellent brood care. She will chase off fish twice her size. This was actually one of the easier fish I have gotten to spawn. I pretty much allowed the female to take care of things. I just watched her until she started to stray away from the fry and then I removed her from the tank. I think these fish are very interesting in both behavior as well as in their brood care. I would recommend these fish especially to those who have never kept New World Cichlids. They also stay a nice size.

Be prepared to deal with very slow growing fry. In addition, these fish can become very aggressive. Females in particular are extremely protective of their spawning site. I originally had some flagfish housed with them but had to remove them because the female was chasing them off to the corners of the tank.

— by Duc Nguyen



Photo By Duc Nguyen