

Species Profile: *Astatotilapia latifasciata*

The Lake Victoria region cichlids have always been a source of stress to me. On one hand, the region produces some of the most beautiful cichlids. On the other, many are extremely aggressive, improperly identified, easily hybridize and are generally hard to find. Nonetheless, their colors and appearance always draw me to them. Over the years I have kept various species with mixed results, but one species that I will always have warm memories of is *Astatotilapia latifasciata* (aka zebra obliquidens).

Originally from Lake Kyoga, *A. latifasciata* evolved in a swampy area of the lake that is rapidly disappearing. Its plight is similar to many other species from the region whose habitats are being destroyed.

I was attracted to the wonderful coloration of this species. The bright red and yellow blotches in contrast with the vertical barring on the males are not only unusual, but very attractive. Females have the barring but lack the red and yellow



color. When I first saw a picture of this fish, I knew it would make a great addition to my tank.

I obtained three juveniles and hoped for the best. As they matured, it became evident that luck was on my side. The male and two females were housed in a 75 gallon tank with other Victorians and Malawi mbunas. I fed them a combination of spirulina based flake, pellets and frozen food.

They accepted everything greedily. They got along well with other fish, rarely a target and never aggressive toward other species. Although the male occasionally chased his females, the aggression was never excessive and the females never appeared stressed. This species is definitely not as aggressive as other Victorians.

I was shocked one morning when I found the 1.5" female holding. She looked so small and I was sure she wouldn't hold her eggs the first time around. To my surprise, she not only held the eggs, but she had a large 20 fry clutch. The female



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and the fry were kept alone in a 10 gallon tank. After releasing the fry, I soon learned that *A. latifasciata* females are great mothers. Every night the mother would take her fry back into her mouth. In the morning, she would release them again so they could feed. I let her stay with the fry for about a week before returning her to the main tank. I've since read that the females will guard their fry for months.

The fry grew quickly and that was good because it became apparent that these fish are very prolific. From what I've heard, they have a short reproductive window and they sure make the best of it. Between the two females, I had new fry about every 3 weeks. I couldn't give them away fast enough. Everyone I knew got some of their offspring.

A. latifasciata is a great starting species for anyone thinking of trying out Victorian cichlids. They mix well with Malawi cichlids, both haps and mbunas.



— by *Robert De Leon*