

Species Profile: *Aulonocara stuartgranti*

Aulonocara stuartgranti "Ngara Flametail" is a maternal mouthbrooder native to the Mdoka, near Ngara, Lake Malawi. The local climate is in the mid 70's to 80's and the pH of the native waters for this fish is between 7.8 to 8.6. Males achieve a size of about 5" and are blue on the face and dorsal fin. The flank is orange or red starting at the shoulder and going all the way to the tail. Females achieve a size of about 3" and are the classic peacock brown.

I originally obtained eight ½" long fish from local hobbyist. These particular fry were supposedly from a line breed variety that produces a fire engine red color. Once large enough to sex, I kept a single pair. The fish bred in a 75 gallon tank which contained pool filter sand and was not planted. The tank was well filtered and had a pH of 7.8. I performed weekly water changes equal to 20% of the tank volume. Fish were fed a combination of HBH flake and pellets (krill) with an occasional Cyclop-eeze treat.

Although I did not observe the spawning, the female released 11 fry. While holding, the female stayed on the fringes of the tank most of the time. At about 3 weeks, I moved the female to a breeding net in another tank. Fry were released later that evening and were well developed at about .25", maybe a little larger, with no noticeable egg sack. Once the female released the fry, she did not exhibit any tendency to care for them.

The next day I moved the fry to a 10gal tank of their own. The tank had a seasoned sponge filter and an AC150 with pre-filter, no substrate. I started the fry off on Cyclop-eeze and crushed flake. I also tried Golden Pearls which they seem to get very excited by, but did not eat well. I believe that the smell was very attractive, but the texture was not to their liking.

The adult male is taking a long time to fully develop his coloration. The blue and yellow came at an early age but the change to red/orange is very slow. The pair spend the day sifting through the sand and swim-

ming around. I was surprised that this pair spawned so soon, especially since the female is so small (about 2"). I was even more surprised that the female held her first time around. The brood was smaller than what I expect in the future. I had heard that this particular variant was difficult to breed but they seemed to know what they were doing. This variant is especially attractive. Even though it hasn't developed its colors completely, it is still very beautiful.

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Since this fish can get to a good size and is sometimes aggressive toward the female, I would recommend nothing smaller than a 4 foot tank with multiple females. Tank mates should be other peacocks or haps, but with nothing too aggressive. Spirulina is well accepted, but a diet also including more "meatier" food is recommended.



—by Roberto De Leon