

Species Profile: *Cynotilapia afra* 'Cobwe'

Background:

Cynotilapia were first described by Gunther in 1893 as belonging to *Hemichromis*. Reagan, in 1922, described this genus again using its unusual dog-like dentition for the genus name. *Cynotilapia* means dog tilapia in Latin. "Representatives of *Cynotilapia* have long, well-separated, unicuspid teeth, strongly conical in the outer row. The teeth of the inner rows are smaller and irregularly spaced."^[1] *Cynotilapia afra* was the only described species for many years. However, in recent decades

work has progressed and there are approximately a dozen named species. I personally think the *afra* group will eventually be sorted out and a few new species named. The locale variant I have is from the eastern (Mozambique) shore of Lake Malawi, just about at the center the lake at Cobwe. I have used Konings spelling, but have seen this spelled 'Cobue' many times. The correct pronunciation is a little elusive

as well: CO-BOO or COB-WAY. This variant has been sold in the hobby as "Orange Back *Afra*", "Orange Back Cobue" and "*Afra Edwardi*". "*C. afra* has settled in virtually every rocky or intermediate habitat....with males defending small caves among the medium size rocks. *C. afra* has even established itself in sediment-rich habitats such as....Cobwe."^[2] Typical water parameters, aquascaping, and diet for Mbuna apply. Adult size for males is 3 to 3-1/2" with the females being slightly smaller.

Personal Experiences:

I first received an adult F0 trio and an F1 female from fellow HCCC member Chiu Lee (Sharkie) several months ago. They were placed in a 45 gal breeder tank with a quad of Ps polits, a group of six 1-1/2" Lab. Perlmatts and a couple of dwarf bristlenose catfish. The

male *afra* is the undisputed king of the tank. Not even the male polit will attempt to challenge him. A closer look at his face shows the probable reason---this guy has some serious looking chompers and he likes to show them off. He is about the same length as the male polit but has a deeper, thicker body. His color intensity tends to follow his moods. When he struts his stuff, he is gorgeous. The F0 females are reasonably attractive with a solid light blue body and hints of black in the tail and dorsal fins. I think that using an actinic light



Photo By Chiu Lee

bulb enhances their looks. The F1 female is intriguing. She shows faint black barring and occasionally you can see some yellow coloration on her head and shoulders in the typical male pattern. Her fry have a unique look as well. I will be experimenting with her line to try to capture and hopefully enhance this female coloration trait. The male is generally sedentary. No matter how or

how often you change up the rock-work, he will choose a 'cave', make a pit in the substrate, and hover near his turf. He comes out to swim with his harem on occasion and rockets to the surface at feeding times. He doesn't chase trespassers for any distance like other territorial males I've kept. Once the interloper is out of his small domain, he returns to his cave. All the other fish generally respect his turf. The females are a little more territorial than I expected but, are generally very peaceful and join with the female polits and young perlmutts in leisurely swims in the mid and upper waters.

Conclusions:

I highly recommend *C. afra* 'Cobwe' to anyone with an interest in Mbuna. They are undemanding, colorful and prolific breeders. While the male will determinedly

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defend his territory, the actual territory is small and the male does not exhibit the same type of random, constant aggressive behavior as a Ps. Polit or a Ps. Demasoni.

*[1] Aqualog, African Cichlids I, Malawi Mbuna (1998)
by Erwin Schraml pg. 6*

*[2] Malawi Cichlids in their natural habitat 3rd Ed.
(2001) by Ad Konings pg.111*

— by Nick Andreola