

Species Profile: *Haplochromis* sp. "flavenentis"

I had the opportunity in 2003 to discuss with one of the worlds most famous fish collectors, Heiko Bleher, one of his amazing finds. Years earlier I had seen a photograph of a beautiful cichlid in his Lake Victoria collection deemed *Haplochromis* sp. "46". Heiko was good enough to carry on an email exchange with me that centered on his collection exploits in and around the Lake Victoria region. One of the recurring topics I managed to slip into our correspondence was this colorful little cichlid he called species 46. When we finally met face to face, Heiko again entertained me with collecting tales and was able to give me a little more information on this *Haplochromis* I so badly wanted to include in my collection. Heiko explained to me that this fish was abundant in and around papyrus roots at the water's edge. The locale was the Yala Swamp region bordering Uganda and Kenya in the Northeast portion of Lake Victoria. I was told that he shipped a sampling of mostly unidentified cichlids to an exporter in Germany. This is where his collected specimens of *Haplochromis* sp. "46" had been sent as well. Heiko's photograph that sparked my interest was taken in this exporters holding tank. In the course of further tracking down this amazing cichlid, I learned that a shipment containing six *Haplochromis* sp. "46" had been sent to the US. This is where the trail went cold. The only other information I was able to gather was that all remaining individuals of the cichlid I sought had been lost in Germany.

As years passed by, I never forgot about my holy grail, the elusive *Haplochromis* sp. "46". I pondered if there was still a wild population, or like so many other cichlids from this region, they had been lost forever.

One afternoon in 2004, I got a call from Dave

Schumacher, a good friend of mine, that a locale wholesale importer had a cichlid I would likely be interested in. Dave pointed out to me a small haplochromine labeled *Haplochromis* sp. "polli". Dave thought that this fish resembled in many ways Heiko's photograph of the species 46. I did not think this to be so and much discussion and research ensued. The "polli" turned out to be a wonderfully beautiful cichlid that bred true. Dave and I have both been successful in propagating this mystery species. While photographically documenting my colony, I happened to snap a shot that made me stare in awe. I had photographed a polli in the same position that Heiko had captured his species 46 in, years before. The similarities were too numerous not to notice. Coloration, body markings, and especially dorsal pigmentation appeared nearly identical. I had little basis to draw a conclusion that the *Haplochromis* sp. "46" and *Haplochromis* sp.



Photo by Greg Steeves

"polli" were one in the same besides the two photographs. I had no dentition, scale embedment, or gut analysis to compare. Neither fish had been described. I am thoroughly convinced that the two fish in question are one in the same. In an attempt to dispel confusion we refer to this seemingly unknown fish as *Haplochromis* sp.

"flavenentis". This correlates to the golden yellow coloration the cichlid exhibits. Fishbase recognizes a *Haplochromis polli* (Thys van den Audenaerde 1964) type locale Stanley Pool, Congo, later described as *Ctenochromis polli* (P. H. Greenwood 1979) but species descriptions do not conform to our cichlid.

Aquatic requirements of *Haplochromis* sp. "flavenentis" are not unlike many other Lake Victoria

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haplochromines. My breeding group of three males and four females are housed in a 55 gallon tank. As with most cichlids, the larger quarters you can provide for them, the more comfortable they will be. *Haplochromis* sp. "flavenentis" enjoy rockwork and are mildly territorial. One male will establish dominance and display more vibrant coloration than his conspecifics. The dominant male will lure gravid females to his loosely held territory by body shaking with all fins fully extended. Colors sparkle from the dorsal when exposed to bright light. Numerous dry runs are made before the female begins dropping eggs. The female quickly turns to pick up her eggs and mouths at the male's occuli.



Photo by Greg Steeves

With her brood fertilized, the female retreats to quiet area of the tank in incubate her larvae. At 80 F the fry have absorbed their yolk sac and are free swimming in 19 days. The dominant male is 11 cm while the females are 9cm. Brood sizes are between 20 and 30 fry. *Haplochromis* sp. "flavenentis" is not at all picky in regards to diet. A good quality staple flake seems to provide ample nutrition for both growth and health. I supplement all my haplochromines with occasional treats of Cyclop-eeze.



Photo by Greg Steeves

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I truly hope that enough serious hobbyists will work with *Haplochromis* sp. "flavenentis" that we may someday see it commonly in our aquaria. It would be a horrible loss if this beautiful little cichlid were to slip into obscurity once again.

— by Greg Steeves



Photo by Greg Steeves



Hap. sp. 46— Used with permission from Heiko Bleher