

## Species Profile: *Iodotropheus sprengerae*

This little mbuna is known in the trade as "rusty cichlid". It grows to around 3", and as Malawians go, it is one of the smaller species. It is not high on the aggression scale in my opinion, but can get rough with its own kind. The safest way I have found to house these guys is to keep a group of around a dozen, this way one fish won't get singled out and picked on. They do have very well defined teeth, and can handle meat in addition to flake. I feed mine ocean plankton once or twice a week for a treat. Brine shrimp and daphnia are also greedily consumed. I feel this should constitute about 10% of their diet. Spirulina flake as well as other commercial flake is fine for their remaining sustenance. They are not fussy eaters in the least. Because they are "rock fish", I include many caves in their tank setup. Unlike other mbuna, males are not territorial to the degree that they will defend a spot against all others. Rusties do co-exist well with other fish that are not too aggressive. I have them housed with *Melanochromis* species which are quite aggressive, but these fish seem to be more concerned with picking on their own kind and leave the *sprengerae* to themselves. They also get along well with *Metriaclima estherae*. I suspect that they will get along with almost all mbuna.

I have my rusties housed in a 45 gallon tank. An AquaClear 200 filters the tank and a 50% water change is done bi-monthly. Shale caves and piles of round river rock are scattered throughout. Temperature is kept around 75F. No special tinkering is done to my water which has a near pH 8. In this setup, the fish spawn regularly. An average spawn is only around 20 fry, but I expect this number to rise as the fish get older. Spawning occurs in the typical mouthbrooder fashion. Fry are hardy and easy to raise. They grow rapidly when well fed and when frequent water changes are done.

Rusties are not the most colorful fish in the world. They are a rusty brown color (hence the common name), but males, when in breeding coloration, take

on a purple hue. They are really quite nice when in this condition. I think the attraction of this fish is that it makes a great contrast to some of the more colorful mbuna. They don't have to be housed in a terribly large tank so anyone without a whole lot of room might find rusties just the thing.

— by Greg Steeves

