

Species Profile: Labidochromis sp. Perlmutt

The common trade names of this Labidochromis species are Perlmutt and Yellow Bar. I first noticed this fish at River City Aquatics in the Austin area during a club meeting of the Hill Country Cichlid Club. The female was a very attractive fish with a yellowish body with dark colored bars running parallel along its sides. At the time the male's bars were not visible but a bright yellow covered most of its body. The yellow was on the top portion from nose to tail. The yellow faded to a white color on the bottom half of its body. The male's dorsal carried tints of yellow and the anal fin had noticeable egg spots. This appearance and their activity in the tank may have been what attracted me to the fish.

In its native tropical habitat, the Perlmutt is found along the coast line in the rocky area at a depth of 30 to 45 meters. These areas include Higga Reef and Mbamba Bay Island. They are also found further south of Mbamba Bay along the rocky coast. The males are not territorial and occupy cave areas, but do not remain in one certain cave. Spawning will take place in any area. However in your aquarium the male will defend a spawning site. The Perlmutt feeds on small vertebrates it finds on

overhanging rocks and on the ceiling of the caves.

The males reach a length of 9 cm and females are about 7 cm in length. I described the color that attracted me to these fish when I first saw them at River City Aquatics. Needless to say they were **purchased 10-15-05**, that same day. They were placed in a divided 20 gallon tall tank. The colors lessened slightly the first day but soon intensified.



Photo by Greg Steeves

The pair **spawned 10-19-05** (5 days later). The male was removed and placed in a community tank. I soon realize the colors that attracted me were their spawning attire and they would lessen their intensity after the spawn. They are both still nice looking, but the male developed light brown colored bars on a lighter yellow body. The same

pattern was present in the female but was distinguishable by size and fin coloration in the male and has egg spots on his anal fin. Later that week I noticed she was **not holding 10-26-05** (7 days later).

I assumed since it was such a short duration to hold the fry that she did not hold them long enough. I did check the tank and did not see

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any fry. The female was left in the breeding compartment and I began feeding her so that she could gain strength and be healthy when placed in community tank. I finally **removed female 11-01-05** (6 days later). During the "catching phase" of the female I still did not see any fry. When tank space becomes available it receives maintenance by cleaning the glass and vacuuming the substrate and rinsing the sponge filter. This time however, there were new fry located in the next compartment of the tank and I did not want to disturb them. Plus there was no other females holding at the time, and the space was not needed, so the Perlmutter's tank space was left untouched. Lucky for me, these occurrences took place.

Later during one of my feedings, I spotted movement in the empty portion of the divided tank that belonged to the Perlmutter. On further investigation there was **notice-**

able fry in tank on 11-06-05 (5 days later). They were very small and only visible in the substrate when they moved about. I had missed them the first time I checked and blame this on the tank being on the bottom level and me and my bifocals. I was very lucky that I was in no hurry to clean that tank.

There are 7 fry that survived and all are growing very fast. During spawning that took place

the male was very active, displaying his colors and vibrating his body to attract the female. She was easily attracted and both were circling each other and I assume spawned later that day. Which of course I missed because I thought the spawning had just started and I would be able to observe later on. But what I failed to realize was the courtship had been going on since the time they were purchased.



Ps. elongates & *Lab. sp* Perlmutter

Photo by Greg Steeves

The pair was housed in a divided 20 gallon tall tank, with water temperature of 80 degrees F. The luminescent lighting was on approximately 14 to 15 hours daily. No water changes or cleaning of the sponge filter takes place until the fry are two weeks or older and then only 20% of water volume is changed. Sponge filters are not touched until the fry are removed to make room for more spawning fish.

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NOTE: by not cleaning the sponge filter, the fry were able to feed on the fine particles attached to the sponge and kept them healthy until they were seen and I realized my mistake. Both the adults and the fry are feed the same food, HBH Seafood Lovers Flake and a small amount of HBH Veggie Flake but the flakes are crushed into fine particles for feeding the fry.

Only now that I have moved the pair to a community tank can I observe the male displaying his defensive colors. These colors are very striking and intense along with circling and nipping at intruders. This fish was not hard to breed and if they are set aside alone in another tank they will surely spawn. Make sure that when the female is not holding any longer that you check very closely for any small fry that maybe hiding. Two reminders, and this is for most mouth brooders not just Perlmutter. The male should be removed once the spawning is over and the female is holding, unless the tank is large and there are places for the female to hide. The other is always feed the female for several days to ensure she has her strength back and will be ready to be placed back in a community environment .

Most of the information I have gathered from Ad Konings book "Back to Nature Guide to Malawi Cichlids" shows that the Perlmutter's natural habitat is at Higga Reef, Mbamba Bay Island. And south of Mbamba Bay in the rocky coast line. These fish are found in large cave

areas in deep water of 30 to 45 meters. These caves are also where they locate their food source. They dine on the invertebrates that live on the cave ceilings or under the overhanging rocks. In the wild the males are not territorial and move around from cave to cave and spawning can take place any where that a female may be encountered. The information states that in an aquarium, the male will defend a spawning site. I did not observe any defenses because there were no other fish around.

This fish has not shown any aggression in the community tank, but will not back off from any others that may attempt to intimidate him. It was an easy fish to breed, but I do not know how long they normally hold the fry, since she

Spawn Timetable
Purchased 10-15-05
Spawned 10-19-05
Not holding 10-26-05
Removed female 11-01-05
Noticeable fry in tank 11-06-05

■ *Jim Beck*