

Species Profile: *Pseudocrenilabrus nicholsi*

Pseudocrenilabrus nicholsi or Nichols' Mouthbrooder, is a maternal mouthbrooder native to the eastern Zaire basin in Africa. The climate is sub-tropical with temperatures in the mid 70's to 80's and native waters for this fish are pH of 7.0. I obtained six 3/4 inch long fish from Aquabid. Males achieve a size of 2.5 inches. *Pseudocrenilabrus nicholsi* are primarily metallic blue color with ruby red spotting on the scales. The dorsal, anal, and caudal fins are also ocellated with metallic blue and bright red. The head region is a beautiful metallic gold color. Females achieve a size of 2 inches and are unfortunately, like most Haplochromines, the females are basically a drab silver-brown color.



The fish bred in a 20 gallon long tank which contained sandy substrate and was planted with *Anubias barteri*. The tank was filtered by a sponge filter and had a pH of 7.5. I performed weekly water changes equal to 20% of the tank volume. I used fluorescent lighting for a duration of 14 hours each day. I fed the fish Tetra Cichlid flakes, spirulina flakes, and live baby brine shrimp.

When spawning, the color of the male intensifies. Females change to a bright yellow and the brown markings fade a bit. The pair cleaned a piece of slate together. Next, the female laid an egg and picked it up in her mouth. The pair assumed a "T" position and the female then bit at the egg spot of the male fertilizing

the eggs.

The pair laid approximately 10 eggs. After spawning, the female retreated to a hiding place to avoid harassment by the male. I moved the female to a thickly-planted 10 gallon tank. This tank provided lots of hiding places to make the female feel comfortable. Approximately 7 eggs viable and hatched after 20 days. The fry were a yellow-tan in color and about 3/8 of an inch long and looked very similar to their parents. The fry didn't require any special care on my part. I left them in the 10 gallon tank after moving the female back to the community tank. The tank used a sponge filter for filtration. Once the female released the fry, she did not exhibit any tendency to care for the fry. I started the fry off on Liquid fry food. After seven days I started feeding crushed flake food. The fry grew slowly.

This is an extremely easy fish to induce to spawn. When I received my first group, they spawned within the first couple of weeks. After re-introducing the females to the community tank, it did not take them long to spawn again. The most challenging aspect of raising these fish is that the fry are very slow growers. Also, behavior wise, the *Pseudocrenilabrus nicholsi* are significantly more aggressive than the *Ps. multicolor*. This was actually one of the easier mouthbrooders I have bred. As stated earlier, the hardest part is keeping the fry. Typical spawns were about 20-25. While breeding *Pseudocrenilabrus nicholsi* was relatively easy, I would recommend them to keep with Africans. They are beautiful, if aggressive, fish.

Be prepared to deal with very aggressive males and offer lots of cover both at the bottom and top of the tank. My dominant male beat up both males and females on a regular basis requiring me to remove the injured fish to other tanks to recover. Males will attack brooding females, so is best to remove her to a well planted tank with some dither fish. Despite these challenges, you should give this fish a try.

—by Duc Nguyen