

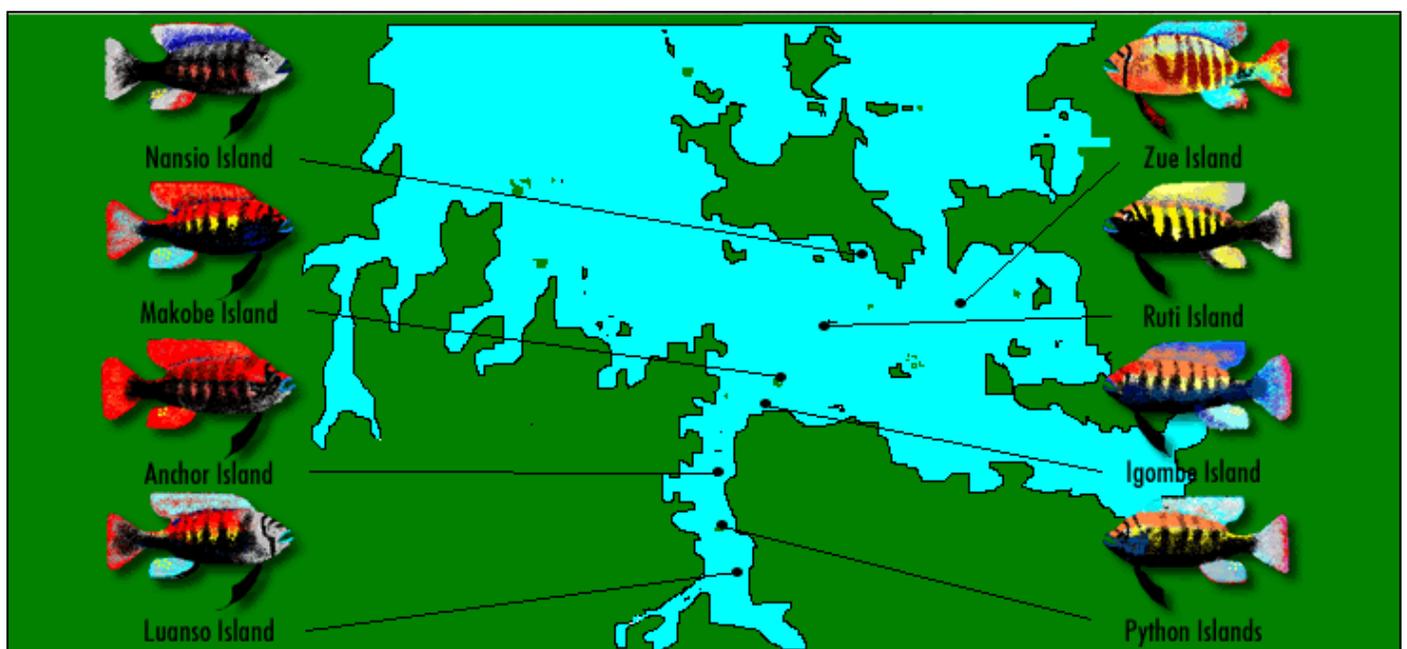
Species Profile: *Pundamilia nyererei* of Mwanza Bay

The *Pundamilia* complex of animals contains some of the most beautiful brightly colored organisms found in Lake Victoria. This genus is in constant revision and most individuals of this grouping are recognized by where they are found rather than an adopted name. I feel as work progresses with *Pundamilia*, we will see an entire revision of this genus with species, sub-species, and locale variants. Identifying an individual nyererei is important to the hobbyist because all fish in this grouping will interbreed. We must do everything we can to ensure our strains are as pure as possible. Some *Pundamilia nyererei* may be extinct in the wild and most are certainly threatened to some extent. There may be no going back to the wild to collect these fish so it is our responsibility to do everything we can to propagate true lines. Never mix variants of *Pundamilia*.

Pundamilia nyererei are not large fish. Maximum length is around three inches with the females usually being a bit smaller. Nearly all the female *Pundamilia nyererei*, regardless of locale, look similar. Basic coloration consists of a tan brown body with straight vertical striping. Fins are translucent and colorless for the most part with slight tingeing of blue in the dorsal fin. It is the males of this species which we concentrate on

because color and body patterning is unique enough to be able to pin down what variant we are dealing with. *Pundamilia* have a nearly straight slope to the forehead. The mouth contains three to five rows of randomly spaced bicuspid and unicuspid teeth. Along the lateral line nyererei have small, deeply embedded scales. This is very evident when comparing these fish along side any of the *Paralabidochromis* species. All males of this complex are brightly colored, with red being predominant in most cases. Throughout the southern portion of Lake Victoria, *Pundamilia nyererei* are restricted to small pockets where it would appear that they have evolved as an isolated group. The most obvious barrier that keeps differing nyererei locales from interacting is open water. These fish frequent the shallows where they feed mostly on the small creatures associated with algal growths. There are local populations far removed from each other that are similarly colored, but it is unlikely that these fish came from a common ancestor. More likely, this is a case of parallel evolution.

One species of fish formerly known as *Pundamilia* "zebra" nyererei has been reclassified as *Pundamilia pundamilia*. This closely related species also has a



Species Profile: *Pundamilia nyererei* of Mwanza Bay

number of locale variants and is subject to revision as well. I only mention this fish because I will not be including it or mentioning it further. If you are trying to identify your nyererei, and it is a black fish with vertical barring, blue dorsal trimmed in red, anal and tail fin red as well, you are probably dealing with a *Pundamilia pundamilia*, not *Pundamilia nyererei*.

Keep in mind when reading the following species descriptions that these observations were mostly made on dominant males in full breeding dress. Differentiation is much more obvious this way. *Pundamilia nyererei* show individual color fluctuations depending on mood as well as some variation between individuals. This guide should be used as an outline and if your nyererei varies slightly, this is perfectly understandable within this genus.

Locale variants of *Pundamilia nyererei*:

Igombe Island

Head coloration: The head features a bright red forehead that fades to orange as it recedes into the back portion of the body. A bright blue band rims the top lip. A black bar extends from the bottom of the jaw and ends at the top of the eyeball. A single thin black bar curves the forehead between the eyes.

Body coloration: Seven wide black bars located from behind the gill plate to the caudal peduncle. Barring fades 3/4 of the way to the dorsal. The underside is solid black. Mid sections of the body are bright yellow. Back portion is orange and fades to yellow towards the tail. Caudal peduncle is dark, almost black.

Fin coloration: The dorsal begins at the first body bar just behind the gills. The bottom portion is colored orange 2/3rds of the way back. A blue line begins at the first dorsal ray and turns blue-green as it progresses towards the tail. The tail portion of the dorsal fin is totally blue with no orange left at all. The anal fin is bright

blue with 3-5 egg spots. Pelvic fins are jet black. The tail fin is translucent tinted blue with a dull red trim on the end. Top portion of the dorsal is lighter than the rest of the fin and a yellow color.



Igombe Island
Photo by Greg Steeves

Python Island

Head coloration: Orange forehead. Jaw region is dark blue. A thick black bar runs from the bottom of the jaw, through the eye on a slant and around the forehead. A dominant black bar runs across the forehead between the eyes. Gill plates are blotched black.

Body coloration: Four dominant black bars mark the body. A black bar is also found behind the gill plate but blotched in a manner that it is not as evident as the more defined bars on the body. There is a bar on the caudal peduncle as well but again, not as defined as the four that adorn the body. The thick barring fades to a thin line 3/4 up the body towards the dorsal. Back portions of the body are a dull orange. Yellow body portions are evident between the thick black bars but are also blotched black along the lateral line. Under-



Python Island
Photo by Greg Steeves

Species Profile: *Pundamilia nyererei* of Mwanza Bay

side of the fish is jet black. The orange of the back extends through the caudal peduncle and ends where the dorsal fin begins.

Fin Coloration: The dorsal fin is light blue almost white with tinges of orange at the front half. Dorsal fades to almost translucent towards the tail. Anal fin is brightly colored a vibrant blue that fades to red away from the body. Four to seven egg spots adorn the back portion. Tail fin has bright blue fin rays that fade into red as they reach the end. Tail fin is blue 2/3 and red 1/3. Pelvic fins are the same black coloration as the belly portion of the body.

Makobe Island

Head coloration: Top and bottom lips are rimmed bright blue. From the top of the lip, through the eye, and to beyond the gill plate is black. Forehead is brightly colored deep red. Thin black bar runs between the eyes. Thick black bar runs around the forehead fading towards the back portion of the eye. A third black bar runs around the back portion of the head where the dorsal slope begins.

Body coloration: Five distinct thick black bars run from the belly 2/3's up the body. Another bar is located behind the gill plate but is obscured by the black cheeks. The barring on the caudal peduncle is not evident as the portion of the body from the beginning of

the anal fin to the tail fin is predominately black. Bright yellow body markings are evident along the lateral line. The top portion of the back is the same bright red coloration found in the forehead. Faded traces of black run to the dorsal from the body bars. The black under side extends to engulf the full back section of the fish with just a hint of red running along the top of the caudal peduncle.



Fin coloration:

The dorsal fin is bright red, the same coloration as the top of the body. The last 5 dorsal spines are colored blue and contrast clearly with the rest of the fin. The tail is a solid red with blue tinges in the rays along the middle of the fin. The anal fin is sky blue with an orange tinge contained in the first 3 fin rays. Three to seven egg spots are found near the back portions of the tail. Pelvic fins are solid black with the first 2 fin rays extending beyond the others.

The rest of the species will be described in the next issue. They include Ruti Island, Nansio Island, Anchor Island, Zue Island and Luanso Island.

Artwork property of Greg Steeves and www.africancichlids.net.

— by Greg Steeves