

Species Profile: *Pyxichromis orthostoma*

As part of the Kyoga drainage system, Lake Nawampasa is home to a most interesting piscivore, *Pyxichromis orthostoma*. Nawampasa is a shallow small lake less than a square kilometer in area. It is separated from the larger Lake Kyoga by a thin strip of swamp. Lake Nawampasa is the last refuge to a few cichlids that were once found in Lake Kyoga. *Pyxichromis orthostoma* appears to belong in this group. The wild population is considered severely threatened.

In the aquarium, *Pyxichromis orthostoma* is not the most colorful cichlid. For the most part the fish is an unassuming silver, males however show some red on the body. *Pyxichromis orthostoma* is peaceful with fish of its own size or larger. This ambush predator has a huge mouth and is able to snatch any unwary fish smaller than itself. Reports state that *Pyxichromis orthostoma* can reach eight inches in length. My colony contains individuals between three and four inches. I have kept my group with Victorian Haplochromines and mbuna, but they seem to do much better when kept by themselves. It took our group about two years to begin breeding. First spawns were small, about one dozen eggs. This was likely due to the females picking up gravel and tumbling it with their larvae. I believe the gravel likely damaged most of the eggs of a much larger spawn. On a hunch (and after reading Loisalle's article on *Yssichromis*) I set up a tank with a fine sand substrate and plastic reed-like plants for decor. The fish seem much more at ease and spawns since have been in the 40+ range. Frequency of spawning seems to have also increased. This may be due to the absence of tank mates or the new substrate, gain size, or perhaps these fish have just become sexually mature. My breeding group of seven Lake Nawampasa *Pyxichromis orthostoma* are housed in a 65 gallon tank filtered with an Aquaclear 300. Two African catfish, *Synodontis eupterus* and *Hemisynodontis membrana-*

ceus share the tank as well. *Pyxichromis orthostoma* is not at all fussy as to feeding requirement but a high protein base diet should be administered for obvious reasons.

Akin to the *Dimidochromis compressiceps* of Lake Malawi and the genus *Altolamprologus* from Tanganyika, *Pyxichromis orthostoma* is a laterally compressed carnivore whose unique appearance and seemingly peaceful demeanor make it a welcome addition to the specialist aquarist looking for something a little different.

— by Greg Steeves



Photo By Greg Steeves



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