

Species Profile: *Thoracochromis brauschi*

— by Greg Steeves

Thoracochromis brauschi is endemic to the Fwa river region of Zaire. I have heard the locale of these fish stated as Lake Fwa. This is not a false statement as Lake Fwa is actually a widening of the Fwa River. Dense vegetation makes collecting in this region difficult at best. There are a number of cichlids endemic to this region but the *Thoracochromis brauschi* is the only one I have ever seen in the hobby. Even this beautiful fish is rare in captivity and I would be very interested in seeing what other gems inhabit this corner of the world.

Both male and female *Thoracochromis brauschi* grow to almost five inches. Females and subdominant males will retain an olive green to gray body coloration while dominant males are brightly colored. Body coloration above the lateral line is a light brown while the belly is white. A black bar runs through the eye. The area around the throat is colored a vibrant blood red giving this fish their common name "blood throat". The bright blue lips are a beautiful contrast on the surrounding red region of the head. The dorsal fin of *Thoracochromis brauschi* is distinctive to this species. A wide black stripe begins at the front of the dorsal region and extends upwards diagonally dissecting the dorsal in half. A thin red line extends along the lower edge of the black dorsal bar with the bottom half of the dorsal fin being hued yellow.

Thoracochromis brauschi is a maternal mouth brooder. It is a mildly aggressive species. Provided that there is ample room with caves and rockwork scattered throughout the tank, it is possible to house more than one male that will show full dominant coloration. If one is to consider trying to give these fish a home similar to their native range, areas of thick plantings should also be included in their tank setup. This however could be trying, as *Thoracochromis brauschi* males will excavate large pits in the substrate. Males are territorial and will stake out a rock formation to call their own. Any aggression shown by this species is confined to small interspecies conflicts. *Thoracochromis brauschi* does not seem to be bothered by sharing tank

space with other species. We have ours housed in a fifty five gallon tank with *Cyprichromis leptesoma* "blue flash", *Synodontis petricola* sp. "dwarf" and *Synodontis nigrita*. This seems to be a pretty good mix as everyone gets along for the most part. *Thoracochromis brauschi* will completely burrow in the substrate when threatened. I believe this to be an evasion technique to elude predation. The first time this occurred, I was attempting to net out a holding female. As soon as the net entered the water, the *brauschi* disappeared. Another observation of interest; broods conceived in my hard water conditions with high pH are always male heavy. I haven't experimented to see if lowering the pH would render more females. *Thoracochromis brauschi* don't spawn with the regularity that most other haplochromine cichlids do. Young females are more prolific than older *brauschi*. Our largest broods have numbered near thirty with 15-20 being the normal clutch size.



Photos By Greg Steeves

Gestation is 20 days at 80F.

Captive feeding requirements pose no problem at all for *Thoracochromis brauschi*. Although any and all food is readily accepted, a spirulina, or green vegetable based diet is advisable to compliment the *Vallisneria* grazing witnessed in wild populations.

Thoracochromis brauschi is a wonderful cichlid for

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the aquarium. It is very hardy and will accept any food offered. Temperament is as non-aggressive as a haplochromine can be. What is unfortunate is that this beauty is not readily available in the hobby. I have stumped many well-seasoned cichlidphiles, who had no idea of what this fish was. Although I don't know it's status in the wild, we should make every effort to ensure the beautiful *Thoracochromis brauschi* stays in the hobby.

On a final note, thanks should be given to Heiko Bleher who in 1988, collected in the Fwa River region and brought back some of the first live specimens that found their way into our tanks. Keep a lookout for more fish from the Fwa River region because if they are half as colorful as *Thoracochromis brauschi*, we are in for a treat.



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