

Species Profile: *Tropheus duboisi*

One look at *Tropheus duboisi* fry and there is no question why they are so popular among aquarists. At only 30 days from spawning, these adorable little fish already show their characteristic black color with white polka dots. The adults are black bodied with blue heads and a white body band, males typically showing wider bands than females. Another sexing trick is to notice the nose shapes of the fish, the females are more round whereas the males will show a slightly upturned face shape.

I keep my group in a 100 gallon tank with *Labidochromis caeruleus*, *Pseudotropheus demasoni*, *Tropheus brichardi* 'Kipili', and *Tropheus moorii* 'Kalambo'. Their tank is decorated with lots of big rocks and has a fine natural sand substrate. It is illuminated by two CoralLife® 50/50 Daylight bulbs and a grow light along the back which I keep hoping will encourage the algae to grow a little faster than they mow it down. The tank is heated by an Ebo Jager® 250 watt heater and filtered by two AquaClear® 500 back filters with additional sponge inserts.

I acquired this group from Bill Nelson (a fellow member of ACA in my area) and was able to personally select each individual and also view the wild caught parents. I started the fry in a 55 gallon tank with the same tankmates they have now and then moved to the 100 gallon as they started to mature. They began showing interest in spawning at around 9 months, or about 2½ inches. It usually takes the females a few times before they are convinced holding the fry to term is better than getting their full share of chow at feeding time. Though they can still eat while brooding, they are not as quick as the other fish and care needs to be taken that they get a sufficient amount of food. Smaller food particles are much easier



for the females to take into their mouths and will also benefit the fry as they mature and start to eat on their own. Brooding takes place for 26-34 days depending on the age and experience of the females. I find that my younger females, especially ones that are brooding for the first time tend to release their fry very early and the fry are noticeably smaller than ones from experienced larger females. Typically *Tropheus* fry are very good sized and quite robust. They grow surprisingly fast when provided with clean water and good quality food. I feed the fry crushed soaked flake right from the beginning and then romaine lettuce once they start to show interest in it, somewhere around 3 months after release.

Generally I do not strip the females as I like to let them interact with their mother and I think it makes the fish stronger. I put the female in her own tank with rocks and ceramic caves, and turn off her light to settle her down. Be sure to check that the water parameters are the same before moving her. She will release the fry to feed once they are free-swimming and she feels secure enough in her tank. *Tropheus* are very good parents and will take the fry back into their mouths anytime danger threatens. I have had females on occasion that release the fry then will have nothing to do with them and just need to be removed and put back in the main tank. This is the exception however, and I tend to see it more with the *Tropheus moorii* types. After the fry start to show their independence it is time to move momma out of the nursery and back to her rightful place in the breeding tank. I wait until night time to move the female, turning off the lights of the big tank and giving the fish some time to relax be-

Photos by Jessica Miller

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fore I introduce the female. I then cover the tank with blankets and leave it covered for the following day, waking them up at dinner time. I have had very good results reintegrating females this way.

There are times when I have run out of space and there is no choice but to strip the female. To do this I wait until the fry are fairly well developed (at least three weeks). You will notice a distinct difference

in the way she carries the fry once they start to put on some real size. She will show a distinctive drop in her buccal cavity as the fry take up more room. This is usually my cue to remove her. If I need to strip her I catch the female and hold her in my hand in a half full bucket of tank water. With my free (dominant) hand I use my fingernail to gently pull down on her lower jaw while dipping her in the water to flush out the fry. The fry try to swim back into their mothers mouth which is really annoying when you are trying to make sure she is clear to go back into the parent tank. A flashlight to see into her mouth is a must! The main thing to keep in mind when stripping is to be very gentle and do not force anything.

I feed all my *Tropheus* OSI Spirulina flake crushed then soaked in liquid vitamin and warm water. They are fed twice daily with the addition of romaine lettuce once a day before they get their breakfast. I also try to encourage algae growth as that is a very good supplement to their daily diet.



Photo by Jessica Miller

As far as water chemistry goes, *Tropheus* are fairly easy to please as long as it's clean and within a respectable range of parameters. I keep my water at a pH of 8.0 or so, temperature is 76-80F depending on the time of year and the tank location. Hardness is moderate at about 240 ppm. I do water changes at 30-35% weekly using four-gallon buckets in which I treat the water with Aquarium Pharmaceuticals Water Conditioner, 1/4 teaspoon Seachem® Tanganyikan Buffer, and Kent A F Cichlid Rift Lake Trace Element®. I generally use slightly warmer water when I change it which seems to get them in the spawning mood. Also, I turn off the filters when changing the water and the quietness seems to put them into a slightly stressed state which in turn results in more females holding.

The males are very persistent when it comes to getting a females attention. They will do their best to impress her, diving in front of her shimmying and shaking until she finally submits and they assume a "T" position with the males attention on the females anal fin as they sink to the substrate or a flat rock on which to spawn. Here they will take turns circling and nudging the others



Photo by Jessica Miller

genitalia while the female drops an egg then quickly spins around to pick it up, after which she tends to the male and fertilizes her brood. You will notice little difference in the female and the rest of the group as she will still participate in all feeding activity even eating lettuce! The only indication you will have that she is brooding is that she will show a slight (very slight if her brood is

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small) bulge in her buccal cavity and will be more reserved when she eats.

Tropheus duboisi are one of my favorites among the *Tropheus* group. Not only are they fairly easy going, but they are fun to watch interact and extremely social in the aquarium. They are not shy with their handlers and more resilient to change in environment and diet than their *Tropheus moorii* counterparts. Besides, with those polka dots, who could resist them?

— *by Jessica Miller*