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Introducing
Parananchromis gabonicus

By Karen Horrocks

Introduction

The species *Parananchromis gabonicus* was first described, by Dr. Ethelwynn Trewavas, in 1975 as *Nanochromis gabonicus*. The type specimen was a single female, which had been caught in a roadside pool during the Cambridge Expedition to Gabon in 1957. In 1987 the genus *Nanochromis* was revised by Greenwood and this species was placed into the newly erected genus, *Parananchromis*. The reason for this placement was due to differences in the positioning of the lateral lines in the species that remained in *Nanochromis* and those placed into *Parananchromis*. There are currently five species in the genus *Parananchromis*, these being, *P. longirostris*, *P. caudifasciatus*, *P. gabonicus*, *P. sp. "Rio Muni"* and *P. sp. "Belinga"*. Only as recently as 1986 were specimens from the genus collected in Ghana and first returned alive to Europe by Landsberg, Numerich and Wunderlich.

Obtaining Specimens

It is only through being a member of an Area Group, or organisation such as the BCA, meeting other members, that one learns which are the type of retail outlets which will put themselves out to obtain the rare or unusual. Sometimes you will find that these retailers themselves are members of such organisations, having their own interest in the rare and obscure species.

What I have found out is that there are, in the North of England, a good number of quality cichlid retailers, who are extremely helpful in obtaining particular species from abroad. One such retailer recently spoke to me about a West African species that had appeared on his wholesalers list, *Parananchromis gabonicus*, was I interested? (Is water wet?). Although at the time the new Tetra book on West Africans was not available, I knew Mary Bailey had a preview copy. So, having telephoned her and gleaned a host of information, the fish were ordered. The retailer duly returned from Holland with three specimens for me, apparently the last ones available from the Dutch wholesaler.

Description

Parananchromis gabonicus are not a particularly striking fish in appearance, indeed the three specimens I had obtained were just a drab beige with darker markings along the body. The edge of the dorsal fin and top edge of the caudal fin are black, with a thin red band just below this. They have retained this colour up to the present. Once the new Tetra book was available, through BCA Sales, I obtained my own copy to try to improve my knowledge of the species. Then I contacted the BCA Librarian and borrowed his copy of the original description. I used the two in an attempt to accurately identify the sex of my fish.

The holotype description was based on a female, which helped me a great deal as it meant that any information gleaned from the type description should be identical to any female I had. From photographs in the Tetra book, all my fish seemed to resemble a specimen identified as a male. This seemed very strange to me as my previous experience with African cichlids, especially Malawi's, had shown the sub-adult colour to be as that for the adult female. However, in her original description, Dr. Trewavas notes that there is "A black spot at the tip of each pelvic fin", only one of my three individuals had this minor distinguishing feature. This feature was not mentioned at all in the Tetra book or was apparent in the photographs accompanying the text. I therefore made a tentative identification that my specimens of *P. gabonicus* were two males and one female.

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In the original description the size given for the type specimen is 60mm Total Length. although it is now believed that this species grows to 120mm in males and 100mm in females. As my specimens range from 35mm to 60mm, maybe they are too young as of yet to exhibit any adult coloration, or perhaps the female only displays the reported bronze to orange body colour prior to spawning.

Further Additions

Early in November 1995 I was again contacted by the retailer, who had supplied my trio of *P. gabonicus*. He had managed to get hold of another 'pair' and was offering them to me. So I purchased them for two reasons, firstly to help me confirm the sexes of my existing trio, secondly to give me a larger gene pool to work with when they start to spawn. When I collected the pair I noticed that one of them, although only slightly larger than my largest male, had considerably longer fin extensions to its dorsal, anal, and pelvic fins. I therefore assumed this to be the mate. The new female displayed the same drab beige colour and patterning as my original trio.

I added the new arrivals straight into the same tank as my trio, firstly by floating the bags prior to slowly mixing the water. As the new fish floated in their bags, the original female underwent a dramatic colour change and started to display to the still bagged new male. At least it now looked like I had a definite pair from my group of five. This leaves me with a further two males and a female to get a second pair from. Also, as the fish have been obtained from separate imports, I am hopeful that they are unrelated and will provide a strong basis for a breeding programme.

The species is reported to be a substrate spawner that exhibits full bi-parental care. They are cave spawners and I hope to be able to report my first breeding success in the near future.

Tank Conditions

Water conditions in the aquarium for maintaining this species should be as close as possible to that of the natural environment, soft and low in dissolved minerals, but well oxygenated. I can find no reference to the natural temperature range, although the usual tropical range of 22-25 °C (74-78°F) should be fine. These fish feed by picking at the sand substrate I have provided. They seem to really relish Cyclops, brine shrimp and bloodworm. They will also take small pieces of flake and a finely grated dry shrimp mix. I will report later in detail on the maintenance of this species, hopefully with spawning details as already mentioned.

References

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