

FOURSPINE CICHLID, *Neolamprologus tetracanthus*

By Chase Klinesteker SWAM, Jan-Feb 2004



Young *Neolamprologus tetracanthus*, Photo by Darrell Ullisch

BACKGROUND

Neolamprologus tetracanthus is endemic to Lake Tanganyika in Africa. It inhabits the transitional zone between the rocky bottom and the sandy shore. 75 to 82 degrees is a good temperature range. They are cave spawners and defend their territory vigorously. They can be very nasty, yet are one of the most beautifully striking of the African cichlids. Their favorite food in nature is snails found on top of the sand. My fish ate a variety of dry foods, frozen brine shrimp, and beef heart. They reach the size of 8 inches and prefer harder alkaline water. I used seashells and dolomite gravel to keep the hardness up.

MY STORY

About a year ago I bought a bag at auction containing 3 *Neolamprologus tetracanthus* about 1 1/2 inches long. They were not particularly attractive but could hold their own with other African cichlids so I placed them in a tank with similar sized fish. Soon they were dominating the tank and scrapping somewhat among themselves. As they grew larger, 2 of them seemed to get along OK but the third was being picked on by the other 2. This was a sign they might be a pair so I removed the one being picked on. The

"pair" ate well and grew for several months, dominating the other fish. Even though spawning pots were present, they did not spawn. At about 5 1\2 inches for the largest one, I moved them to a separate tank. The colors now were striking, with rows of silver white dots covering the fins and body against a darker background. The tail and dorsal fins were edged in white. The smaller of the two was the darkest and at times the fins and body would turn so black that most of the white would disappear. I thought that this was the male because the larger fish was slightly plumper. These fish are difficult to sex. Some books state that the male is the larger of the sexes. I still am uncertain as to which fish was the male even after they spawned and raised fry!

BREEDING

The pair began scrapping and it looked like I might have to remove one when I thought it might be worth a try to add some scrappy "dither" fish. I had 2 *Paratilapia polleni* about the same size that were not getting along also, so I placed them in the tank along with a number of pots, caves, and rocks. The *Paratilapia* became somewhat dominate but it was a good standoff. A while later I noticed the *Paratilapia* with shredded fins with the *Lamprologus* being very dominate. A few days later I noticed a number of eggs laid on the top inside of a large pot. It was late at night and I planned to remove with a siphon some of the eggs from the pot the next morning to ensure getting BAP points. When I came down the next morning, the eggs were gone! They must have eaten them since the pair was swimming around the tank and I could not see any fry from a casual inspection. Imagine how surprised I was about a week and a half later when I noticed a cloud of about 200 fry being protected by the *Lamprologus*. The *polleni* were being kept at the other end of the tank. After I removed the *polleni*, the *tetracanthus* were excellent parents attending the fry. Other fish could be seen in adjacent tanks which kept the parents busy.

FRY EASY TO RAISE

The fry are fairly easy to raise. They will take newly hatched brine shrimp at first but I noticed them grazing on algae that was present on the glass and pots. For this reason I also fed them crushed spirulina flake when they started taking dry food. They are fast growers and should be given lots of room.

Neolamprologus tetracanthus is a beautiful and challenging fish to breed. Their disposition and difficulty in sexing and breeding make them especially rewarding to keep.