

Altamprologus compressiceps

The Compressed Cichlid

By John Moyles

This handsome cichlid (*Altamprologus compressiceps*, Boulenger, 1898) is small indigenous cichlid of Lake Tanganyika. This fish is also known by the common moniker of “Comp”. This species has evolved to live in areas with a rocky coast, sometimes with a sand bottom that is strewn with plenty of empty snail shells. It can be found at depths of 3 to 45 feet

Description

Comps are characterized by a laterally compressed body, a sloping forehead with a turned-up snout, bold, tiger-like stripes and white to blue spots that decorate the back two-thirds of their flanks. Males have more intense spots than females. Comps are closely related to *Altamprologus calvus*. These two differ in that Comps have shorter jaws and their snout is turned up, whereas the *calvus* has a long, sloping face. Comps' bars are more distinct and their spots less so, being just the opposite of the *calvus*. Adult males can attain maximum lengths of six inches, while females max out at around four inches. Once mature, males are also higher-bodied and possess more elongated fins.



Like most fish from Lake Tanganyika, many color morphs are available. The standard *A. compressiceps*, which is typically a black fish overall, is found throughout the lake. However, a full yellow form comes from Kambwimbwa in northern Tanzania, while the goldhead morph, which naturally has a gold head and a black body, is found at Tanganyika's southern end, near Mutondwe Island in Zambia. Other morphs, such as red-fin black and red-fin orange, are also available from time to time.

Diet

Comps are a predator, and they specialize in snatching young cichlids and invertebrates from between crevices. Their laterally compressed body allows them to go into narrow crevices where prey might be hiding. Small fishes should not be kept in the same tank with this fish as Comps may eat them. Fish over an inch are typically safe; however, caution should still be exercised.

In captivity, a diet of high quality, high protein, flake or pellet food should be supplemented with frozen and live foods. Blackworms and properly quarantined guppies are devoured with gusto. While hunting, Comps will cruise along for prey. Once a target has been identified, it will keep its eye locked on the prey, and raise its body upwards before striking. It almost appears to float, lifeless and is one of the more interesting feeding behaviors to observe.

Breeding

Altalamprologus species are substrate spawners. It is pretty easy to miss this fish spawning, as it is a very secretive spawner. Spawning takes place in a cave, shell, or flowerpot too small for the male to enter. The male will release his milt at the entrance. Both the male and female will then fan their fins to direct it to the eggs, which have been dropped on the substrate. Typical spawns may number as many as 200. After spawning the male would become very defensive and attack the sides of the tank during feedings. Females can spawn every 25-35 days when kept in condition. The eggs take more than a week before they hatch and are mature enough to move out on their own. The fry are quite large, but require a very long time to grow to maturity. The male would become very defensive and attack the sides of the tank during feedings. For example, it may take six months or more for a Comp to reach 1.5 inches. This is why they are sometimes very expensive. They are best kept and bred as pairs, but can also be kept as a colony.



Habits

They make a great addition to many setups because they tend to mind their own business, but can certainly hold their own. The thick, ctenoid scales of *Altalamprologines* give them an efficient defense against attacks by both predators and fish protecting their fry. When attacked, they will bend their bodies so as to expose their sharp scales to an enemy, which makes them hard to swallow and could damage the attacker.

Comps are not territorial nor are they aggressive towards other cichlids of similar size. When introducing one to your aquarium, don't be alarmed if it hides for several weeks before it becomes comfortable with its surroundings. Just be patient and ensure good water quality. Feeding at night, with the lights out, can also help.

Altalamprologines in general make a great addition to most any Tanganyikan community setup. They can also be kept with many of the fishes from Lakes Malawi and Victoria, provided the latter also require a high protein diet.