

## **Gephyrochromis acei**

**By Tony Jochman**



*Gephyrochromis acei* are a beautiful, deep purple fish with yellow fins which reach an adult size of about 4-6 inches, with the male slightly larger than the females. They were until recently classified as *Pseudotropheus Acei*. They are Mbuna from Lake Malawi, and are fairly aggressive, though less so than most *Pseudotropheus sp.* A few years ago, these were a very rare fish in North America, and still very little info can be found about them online. They are very easy to breed, and this has quickly made them much more common and more available. I've recently seen them in Walmart, though for obvious reasons I recommend you get your stock at a more reputable fish store.

I picked up a 10 small fry at the GBAS fall auction 2001, and after a grow-out period, introduced them to a 30 gallon tank. At the time, tankmates included *L. caeruleus*, and a pair of *Melanochromis johanni*. They lived peacefully together but I had to clear out the *L. caeruleus* to make space for them to breed.

Both males and females possess dummy egg spots on their anal fins, though the male's is considerably brighter than the female's. Thus, telling them apart can be difficult, though if you watch them for a little while, behavioral differences should manifest. The male is usually considerably more aggressive than the female. Of course, to be certain, the fish should be vented.

When not mouthbrooding, the *acei* swim constantly through the upper reaches of the tank, and the male frequently chases the females, or alternatively, tries to convince them to breed by shaking his tail at them. Then chases them when they're not receptive.

There are rocks piled throughout the tank, and some fake plants. The pH in the tank is 8.8, the hardness is around 14 dKH, temperature at 78F. Water changes have been done at the rate of 25% weekly. Nitrates, specifically, are kept very low (<10 ppm).

The mating ritual itself takes place on a high, flat rock. The fish circle each other, each fish nipping/nudging the anal fin of the other, while the other fish shakes its tail. When done, the females develops the characteristic throat lump which tells of a mouthbrooding fish. They stop eating as well. In my case, both females were holding within a couple of days to a week of each other. The first female spit her fry early in the main tank; the second was caught (after a long chase) and gently stripped into a bucket. The fry were transferred into a 10 gallon tank with a sponge filter for filtration. They were able to accept finely crushed flake food from day 1, and have grown quite quickly. About 3-4 weeks after the females were stripped of their fry, they were again holding, and both were recently stripped. The first batches were relatively small about 20 fry.

These are a great fish, very easy to breed, and are compatible with most other Malawian cichlids. They have not hassled any other cichlids in the tank, and were frequently run off by the dominant *L. caeruleus* male.