

VARIABILICHROMIS (LAMP.) MOORII

by Chase Klinesteker SWAM, July-Aug 2006



Variabilichromis moorii, Male with fry Photo by Darrell Ullisch

CARE

Variabilichromis moorii is an African cichlid that is found in the southern half of Lake Tanganyika on rocky shorelines in depths of 9 feet or less. Maximum size is about 4 inches. They are rarely seen in stores, or even much in the hobby and not much has been written about them in aquarium books. This is a cave spawner that is quite reclusive. They can be somewhat shy, especially with more aggressive African cichlids. This fish is quite prolific and can lay up to 100 eggs, but can be fairly difficult to spawn, probably because of their shyness. Yet they can be very territorial and aggressive towards others of their species. I had 2 pair that I tried to keep together in a 20 gallon tank with many hiding places, but one male was beaten up so badly that I had to remove one pair to a different tank. They form strong pair bonds and are good parents except that they will spook first and let the fry fend for themselves! They will eat a variety of foods, including flake and frozen brine shrimp. Vegetable matter (spirulina flake) should be included in their diet. Because of their shyness, they are cautious and slow eaters. One key to keeping them healthy and well fed is to make sure any tank companions are not so aggressive as to hog all the food. That is why a single pair is best for breeding.

BREEDING

75-79 degrees is a good temperature range for them and a bit higher for breeding. Plenty of caves and hiding places should be provided. Sexing is difficult, even in adults, but the males often have longer ventral fins and a slight pointing of the dorsal and anal fins. This fish has a different and deeper bodied shape, but is plain olive colored most of the time. Adult dominant males will be darker colored and breeding males are jet black and very beautiful. I like to use dolomite gravel and/or seashells in their tank to keep the hardness closer to that of Lake Tanganyika. Moderate water changes can be helpful, but as with some other Lamprologines, large water changes can shock them or make them inactive for a while.

I was not aware that my pair of V. moorii had bred until I noticed a cloud of about 60 tiny fry around one of the caves. They kept in close formation and reacted quickly to any threat. The parent bond is strong and long

lasting. The fry ate newly hatched brine shrimp and soon were eating fine particles of flake food. As they grew, they wandered farther from the home cave and soon were wandering all around the tank. The parents did not try to herd them around, but defended the home cave well. I would recommend *Variabilichromis moorii* for those who like African cichlids and want something a little different that is a challenge to breed.