

BREEDING *CICHLASOMA DOVII*

by Andrew Boyd

During the Society's fish-buying trip to Sydney I was lucky to find some 10-15 cm long *C. dovii* at a quite reasonable price, so I bought four of them.

For those not familiar with *C. dovii*, it is a member of the *Parapatenia* complex of Central American Cichlids, which includes *C. managuense*, *C. friedrichsthalii* and *C. salvini*. These are all predacious and nasty, and they grow from 20-40 cm long, depending on the species, with appetites to match. On the plus side, their intelligence, amongst freshwater fishes, is second only to the mormyrids (elephantnoses) of Africa.

Along with their nasty temperament, my four also brought a bad case of ich (at no extra charge! - and so did the rams we bought at the same shop). After treatment with malachite green, the disease disappeared.

Our fish had only been with us a week when they decided to spawn. The male's dorsal and anal fins and his throat turned a nice turquoise-blue, and he began displaying for the largest female. We had ended up with only the one male and three females, which was just as well as male *dovii* have a habit of killing one another. This sex can be distinguished, even when not in spawning colours, by the lines of tiny dots covering the body. Females have a large black lateral stripe. Our male coloured up and began to invite into his lair, a large flower-pot in the shape of a conch shell.

Breeding proceeded in the typical cichlid fashion, the female and then the male making alternate passes at the flower-pot, the one laying eggs, the other fertilising them. Unfortunately, we were due out to dinner not an hour later, so we had to leave them to their own devices.

When we returned the eggs were gone. I surmised that our red Oscar was to blame, since it lacked most of its entrails, through a large wound in the ventral region. Mistake number one: never spawn in a community tank! The red Oscar in question was about 20 cm long, but being deeper in the body, its mass was about twice that of either parent *dovii*.

Then an interesting phenomenon occurred: the male *dovii* began to flirt with the second largest, but more colourful, female, much to the annoyance of his 'wife'. Try as she might to keep the new pair apart, by bullying and threat display, they moved into a hollow log together. Looking a little dejected, she migrated to the other end of the tank, occasionally menacing a 35-cm *Tandanus* catfish, but otherwise resigned to playing second fiddle.

We moved the new pair into a 76-litre tank, with the conch flower-pot. After a week of acclimatisation they spawned. Unfortunately as this happened on a week-day afternoon, we missed it. When we came home we found the male prowling outside the pot, with the female inside, fanning the eggs. Not wishing to take any chances, we removed both parents and substituted an airstone, leaving the spawning site where it was.

The fry were wriggling three days later and were soon free-swimming. They were able to take newly hatched brine shrimp as soon as their yolk-sacs had disappeared. They refused all dry foods, including powdered flake, bottom-feeder tablets and crushed trout pellets. Baby daphnia and cyclops were added to their diet soon afterwards.

As soon as they were able, the bigger fry hunted down and ate the smaller ones. After a bit of this 'thinning-out', the fry population stabilised at about thirty. They learned to accept dry food and gradually, were weaned onto crushed trout pellets, with various live foods every other day. Daphnia, bloodworms, mosquito larvae and tubifex were provided.

Now at a month old, the fry are every bit as attractive as their parents. The latter, by the way, have now started to bully our adult Oscars. Does anyone out there want to buy a cheap pair of Dracula Fish?

Author's note: *C. dovii* is now placed, by some, in the genus *Heros*.

2014 Editor's Note: Yet another name change has the "Wolf Cichlid" now called *Parachromis dovii*