



BREEDING THE FIREMOUTH CICHLID

by Karl Puse

The largest problem in breeding the Firemouth Cichlid (*Cichlasoma meeki*) is to find a pair, females being particularly hard to come by. These fish are very expensive so I tend to buy small ones and grow them up in the hope of getting a pair. Years ago I tried breeding the species from 5 individuals that I had reared to reasonable size. Now I know why I had no success: all 5 were males!

About a year ago I was coming back from Sydney and stopped off at Goulburn, where I had heard that Firemouths were sometimes for sale. On the first pass of the shop I missed them but the second time round, I saw 3 very small (2 cm) specimens left in a tank, for \$5 each - a very reasonable price, so I purchased them.

These 3 fish soon grew in a tank high up in my fish room, which always seems to stay between 29°C and 34°C, without any heaters. Two of them soon developed fat bellies - females I thought, but then these 2 paired off, giving the third a hard time. So I took the odd one out and put it into another tank. Then I waited and waited and nothing happened - did I have 2 females? I felt disheartened and thought of selling them. What else could I do, as all 3 looked physically similar at this stage. In the end I gave up and put all 3 back together again but a few days later, the third one and one of the fat ones paired off and started to harry the other one. So I took the loner out again. A little later the third one showed a genital tube, which was flat and confirmed she was a female, and yet she was the thinnest of the lot.

About a week later, the pair produced some eggs, laid on the outside of an overturned flowerpot. Now there are about 50 babies lying on the gravel and waiting for their egg-sacs to go down.

It was a long and confusing struggle to breed the Firemouth Cichlid.

The physical conditions were: temperature, 29°C - 31°C; pH 7 (neutral water); salt content, none (although some might be tolerated); shell-grit, a handfull per 2' x 2' tank.
