

Breeding the Congo Tetra (*Micralestes interruptus*)

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Many years ago I considered adding Congo Tetras to my community tank. As the name suggests this species originates from Africa and is very spectacular when fully mature. At the time I preferred the smaller species of tetra; the Congo Tetra was slightly longer in body length than I was willing to accept. A few months ago however, my mind changed and I purchased ten fish which were in my view less than fit to be sold.

Upon returning home the fish were placed in a specially prepared tank together with some African Longfin Tetras (*Alestes longipinnis*) that were also purchased in Melbourne, but in marginally better condition. Four of the Congo Tetras died over a very short period leaving me with two females and four males. A lot of nursing was required to improve their condition using a selected variety of live food.

Congo Tetras are superbly coloured with deep metallic-green, blue and fire-brown bodies, particularly in the males. The male's dorsal fin is long and pointed and the tail has an elongated central portion with black and white edges. Females are duller and lack these distinguished features.

A schooling species, the Congo Tetra swims rapidly and appreciates a well planted tank. A large tank with good quality water is required for the development of attractive specimens. Males will grow to approximately 80mm in length while females attain about 60mm in length. Male courtship and the rounded bodies of females indicate a readiness to spawn.

The spawning tank should be at least 600mm long to allow for wild spawning runs. The unusually long developmental time of the eggs before hatching (6 days) requires a little more care. In the first spawning trials I used nylon fibres as the spawning media, however this did not produce acceptable results. I then switched to fine water plants bunched on the floor of the tank. This was successful for spawning but after removing the parents and waiting for young to appear after six days I was again disappointed. The whole spawning had been ruined by planaria that had been hidden in the plants.

My lesson learnt, and failing to kill the planaria with copper, I resorted to picking up the good eggs after each spawning and placing them in a small clean tank without plants. Picking out and transferring fertile eggs into a new tank is a laborious exercise, as the eggs are glassy and transparent. Working with a magnifying-glass and glass pipe is a time consuming exercise.

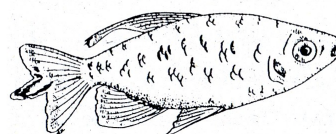
The number of fertilized eggs was low; never obtaining greater than 30% success from this pair of tetras. I tried varying the pH from 6.5 to 7.4 and used water prepared in different ways but without added success. Spawnings consisting of 150-200 eggs with 60-70% of these being attacked by fungus in most instances. The standard exercise was to spend 2-3 hours selecting the "good" eggs.

In the first hatching there were about 30 young and my experience was growing after some minor discoveries about the fry's requirements. Upon hatching the fry eat immediately and move around in the middle depth of their tank, so the first requirement was a lot of live food. I used cyclops nauplia strained from farm pond water, although, newly hatched brine shrimp would be sufficient but more expensive.

The next important observation I noted was that the fry were only accepting microworms that were swimming in the water and not those that had settled on the tank floor. A small improvement was to repeatedly swirl the water to keep the microworms suspended. With this technique the mortality of the young was still high and the growth rate slow.

Later spawnings were more successful and discovering that young fish (10mm) like to eat fine dry flakes from the surface helped a lot with their growth rate. Shape and colour similar to the parents developed when the fish were about 40mm in length.

I can recommend this fish as a good representative of a limited number of true African tetras for the community tank. They deserve to be kept for both their colour and lively behaviour.



Note: *Micralestes interruptus* – the Congo Tetra is now (2014) known as *Phenacogrammus interruptus*