

Checklist

Before purchase make sure that:

- 1 You have the appropriate equipment and position for the aquarium.
- 2 You have researched all the species you are interested in and your final choices are all compatible.
- 3 You are familiar with how to transport and release your fish.
- 4 You are aware of the daily, weekly and monthly maintenance your aquarium will require.
- 5 You are prepared to look after your fish properly for the duration of their life.

Equipment

- 1 Glass or plastic aquarium
- 2 Gravel cleaner
- 3 Water testing kit
- 4 Tap water conditioner
- 5 Gravel
- 6 Filter
- 7 Food
- 8 Heater & thermometer

Before purchase make sure:

- 1 The aquarium is of a suitable size
- 2 Water parameters are as advised in this leaflet
- 3 If adding to an existing set-up ensure these fish are suitable before addition.



Never release your aquarium animals or plants into the wild

Never release an animal or plant bought for a home aquarium into the wild. It is illegal and for most fish species this will lead to an untimely and possibly lingering death because they are not native to this country. Any animals or plants that do survive might be harmful to the environment.

Important things to remember

Always buy...

test kits and regularly check the water for ammonia, nitrite, nitrate and pH. This will allow you to make sure the water in your aquarium is not causing welfare problems for your fish.

Establish a routine...

for testing the water in your aquarium. Record your results to enable you to highlight fluctuations quickly. Also check the temperature of the water.

Maintain...

the water in the aquarium within the accepted parameters highlighted in this leaflet. You may need to do regular water changes to achieve this.

Always wash your hands...

making sure to rinse off all soap residues, before putting them into your aquarium. Wash your hands again afterwards and certainly before eating, drinking or smoking.

Never siphon by mouth...

A fish tank can harbour bacteria which can be harmful if swallowed. Buy a specially designed aquarium gravel cleaner which can be started without the need to place the siphon in your mouth.



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If in doubt contact your OATA retail member for further



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How to care for...



Dwarf Cichlids

27 Tropical freshwater fish



Introduction

The dwarf cichlids are popular fish for aquariums. This is especially so for those who are interested in the behavioural traits of cichlids but do not want the aggression of the Lake Malawi and Tanganyika species.

Commonly this group of small fish are found in South America and Africa. The two most famous are perhaps the Ram and the Kribensis. Other species in this group belong to the genus *Apistogramma*.

Water requirements

These fish are not tolerant of rapidly fluctuating water quality. It is advisable to keep the water parameters within the following guidelines although fish may acclimatise to different water conditions over time:

Temperature: in the mid range of 23 to 28°C

pH: 6.5 to 8.0

Ammonia: 0mg/l (0.02mg/l may be tolerated for short periods)

Nitrite: 0mg/l (0.2mg/l may be tolerated for short periods)

Hardness: Soft to hard (0 to 19°dH)

Biology

These cichlids are much smaller than others available and are somewhat less aggressive. The Kribensis reach between 6 to 11cm; Ram between 3 to 4cm, and the *Apistogramma* species between 6 to 11cm.

Often, the males of these species are larger than the females. The male Kribensis can be identified through a pointed dorsal fin and female Rams and Kribensis exhibit bright purple colouration while in breeding condition.

In the wild, they are found in soft lakes and pools in acidic water river basins of the some parts of the Amazon and African rivers.

These fish are all egg layers. Further details can be found in the breeding section.

In a well maintained aquarium with good water quality these fish can survive for a number of years.

Aquarium requirements

These fish are not large and can be added into community tanks with most placid to slightly aggressive fish with similar requirements. They are best provided with an aquarium with a minimum volume of 60 litres. The aquarium should be equipped with filtration, aeration and a heater.

These fish can adapt to a wide range of water hardness. If you wish to change the water hardness, this should always be done slowly over time to avoid stressing your fish. You may notice increased fish colouration in water which more closely matches that of their natural environment.

The addition of live plants, bogwood and rocks which form caves can provide these fish with shelters and help establish territories. Ceramic plant pots are a useful addition if you plan to breed from your fish as they will use them as breeding areas.

Lighting is recommended as it can help the growth of plants and bring out the vibrant colours of these fish. These fish should also exhibit breeding colouration in the presence of the opposite sex.

Maintenance

At least once every two weeks a partial water change of 25 to 30% is strongly recommended (a siphon device is useful to remove waste from the gravel). The water should be tested regularly to ensure pollutants such as ammonia and nitrites do not build up. Ensure you either allow the replacement water to stand or aerate it to remove any chlorine present. Ideally treat all replacement water with tap water conditioner before adding to the aquarium.

Filters should be checked for clogging and blockages. If the filter needs cleaning then do not run it under the tap, any chlorine present may kill the beneficial bacterial population that has established in the media. Instead it can be rinsed in the tank water which is removed during a partial water change, this reduces the amount of bacteria which are lost.

Good husbandry is essential as these fish can be stressed by even the smallest amounts of ammonia and nitrite. Test the water to monitor the ammonia, nitrite and nitrate levels every week, especially during initial set-up and after adding extra fish.

Feeding

This group of fish are omnivorous although will prefer meaty diets. In the wild, they feed upon insect larvae, worms, crustaceans and algae.

The diet for your fish should match this. Use a good quality granule or pellet, as well as frozen and freeze dried aquarium foods. Live foods can also be added. They should be fed what they can eat within a few minutes 1 to 2 times a day. Remove any uneaten food to reduce waste build-up.

Potential problems

A water quality problem will affect fish behaviour and can be shown by clamped fins, reduced feeding, erratic swimming and gasping at the surface. Immediately test the water if any of these symptoms are shown. If in doubt ask your OATA retailer for advice.

Compatibility

Cichlids have a reputation for being aggressive but dwarf cichlids can be added to community tanks with other peaceful fish. This includes smaller and medium sized tetras, as well as mollies, hatchetfish, swordtails, platies and other semi/non-aggressive catfish.

The Kribensis need to be kept in pairs and the *Apistogramma* species such as the Agassizi and Cockatoo cichlids should be kept with several females to a male. This prevents harassment of any individual female by a male.

Breeding

These fish will readily breed in an aquarium and like their more aggressive relatives, they will also guard and protect the fry.

Eggs are normally deposited inside a cave or pot. The female will often protect the eggs and the male protects the territory outside of the breeding area. The eggs will hatch within 3 to 4 days and are free swimming within another couple of days. Adult fish make good parents and will swim with their offspring ensuring they do not stray too far from the school. Parents will retrieve 'run away' offspring with their mouths, returning them to the group. However, in order to ensure they are not predated on, they can be moved to a separate tank.