

Papiliochromis altispinosa, the Bolivian Butterfly Cichlid

A. Foster

Described in 1911 by Haseman as *Crenicara altispinosa* the Butterfly Cichlid underwent a series of name changes and was lost in obscurity until 1977. The species was rediscovered when a fish that had been caught in Bolivia (South America) in 1967 by Lüling and wrongly identified as *Microgeophagus ramirezi* was re-examined and placed in the genus *Microgeophagus*. At that stage only one other species, the Ram was contained in that genus with a possible third new species to be described. The Butterfly Cichlid has again undergone a taxonomic revision and now belongs to the genus *Papiliochromis*.

It was not until 1985 that the first imports went to Europe and in 1991 were finally imported into Australia. When I was in Melbourne late 1991 I was lucky enough to buy 4 small specimens about 2cm in length. Three made the trip back to Canberra and were placed in a community tank.

Growth while in the community tank was rapid on a varied diet of live mosquito larvae, brine shrimp, frozen daphnia, freeze dried tubifex and flake. After about 2 months they had nearly doubled in size and were beginning to show the first sexual differences.

At about 4 months of age the males' dorsal, anal ventral fins were taking on a longer pointed appearance and along the top and bottom of the caudal fins appeared bright red filaments. The female appeared more compact in the body and appeared to have a rounder head.

I moved the 3 fish to a tank of their own, sparsely planted with crypt, a melon sword, chain sword, hydrophilia and baby tear. A piece of brown slate, broken pot and a large rock were available as spawning sites. The pH was 6.8, hardness 6° and temperature 27 C.

After about a month the larger male paired with the female and ostracised the smaller male. By this time the female's belly was beginning to fill out so I removed the smaller male and re-read (several times) Richter's article in TFH (May 1988, Vol XXXVI

No. 9) on the spawning of this species and so as to know what to expect.

The spawning a week later, took me by surprise! There was none of the elaborate courtship described by Richter. The pair simply cleaned off the piece of slate and laid the eggs. After the completion of egg laying the female chased off the male and began fanning the eggs with her tail and fins. She only left this position on rare occasions over the next few days to feed and harass the male.

Three days after laying, the eggs hatched and the fry were moved to a pit where they were kept for a further 4 days. Again there was a deviation from Richter's description of continuous removal of the fry by the female from pit to pit. It did not matter I was just pleased to have the young! My happiness however, was short lived because on the fourth day the female ate all the fry.

Spawning occurred for the second time about 2 weeks later on the same piece of slate, but, the fry were again eaten when 4 days old. The third spawning occurred a further 2 1/2 weeks later on the flower pot. Not willing to lose another brood, I removed some of the fry and placed them in a shallow bowl. They were aerated and given a 3/4 water change each day with replacement water from the spawning tank.

The male was obviously of the same opinion for on the second day after hatching he kidnapped some of the fry and started to care for them himself. This led to a continual battle with both fish swimming to the others camp and stealing fry: one at a time.

As previously the female left her portion of the brood in a single pit, however the male continually moved his around. After 5 days the fry began to leave the gravel pits keeping both parents so preoccupied with the job of caring for their charges that ceased harassing each other.

Using a diet of newly hatched brine shrimp the young quickly grew and now, a month later are also eating dried food and mosquito larvae.

An interesting final note is that in a community aquarium with other cichlids both parents, care for the eggs and defend the territory equally. The male's presence is tolerated by the female and the overall post-spawning behaviour is far more peaceful.

