

Apistogramma trifasciata Cichlid

Keeping Apistogramma trifasciata cichlids.

By Lee Newman

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A. trifasciata by Oliver Lucanus.

Q. One of my local fish stores just received a shipment of Apistogramma trifasciata. I'd like to keep some as the only cichlids in my 40-gallon aquarium, but don't know very much about this particular species of fish. Any information and tips you could offer would be appreciated.

Kim Brown

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A. Apistogramma trifasciata is perhaps one of my favorite dwarf cichlid fish. While not overly common in the North American hobby, it is one of the smaller, more peaceful Apistogramma species and is therefore desirable for the modestly sized cichlid fish aquarium. Named for the three black stripes (hence the name "trifasciata"), the boldest of which runs from the mouth through the eye and into the rounded caudal fin (tail fin), it also sports extensions from the second to fourth spines of the dorsal fin and comes in a variety of colors, depending on locality or breeding.

First, a 40-gallon fish aquarium should prove ample space for a small group – I'd suggest one male and two females. However, A. trifasciata is typical of the genus, in that you should prepare to offer a lot of shelter in the forms of plants, rocks and other items that can be used to fashion hiding spots and spawning caves. Don't get fooled into thinking that just because your cichlids are small, aggression can be overlooked or dismissed. In the diminutive world of dwarf cichlids, disagreements over territory and mate selection have all the importance and drama as those of their much larger cousins – it's just a little less obvious.

Next, without knowing the origin of your specific fish specimens, I'd suggest relatively soft water since in the natural habitat carbonate hardness is around 4 degrees KdH (that's about 72 ppm of CaCO₃). Luckily, pH tends to be a little on the alkaline side at about 7.4 to 7.6, so you will not have to worry about lowering the pH as you might have to with a lot of other Apistogramma species. The next thing is to keep the water clean with good filtration and a program of weekly aquarium water changes. I should say that since A. trifasciata comes from quite southerly latitudes in South America, southern Brazil, Bolivia, Paraguay and Argentina, you need not keep it as warm as you might some of its Amazonian counterparts; I'd suggest a temperature in the range of 75 to 79 degrees Fahrenheit.

Other than what I've already mentioned, A. trifasciata demands no additional effort than that of any other Apistogramma fish species. The key points are a lot of cover, the right water conditions, and of course, a well-balanced diet of prepared flakes, frozen brine shrimp and bloodworms and the occasional treat of something live – the easiest of which is likely live adult brine shrimp usually available at your local fish store. Good luck with the A. trifasciata!