

## Jewel Cichlids

### Choosing colorful jewel cichlids.

*By Richard Bireley*

Colorful jewel cichlid by Tony Terceira.

Q. I have a 55-gallon tropical fish aquarium where I keep a pair of jewel cichlid fish (*Hemichromis bimaculatus*). I have been trying to breed this tropical fish for a while and finally succeeded a few weeks ago. Now that I have that fish aquarium under control, I am getting a 75-gallon fish aquarium and I want to find a more colorful fish to breed in it. I was wondering if you had any suggestions on a colorful cichlid fish to breed. Also, I was wondering if there would be a good pair of different cichlid species to breed and make a colorful hybrid. Thanks for your time.

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A. First, I'd like to congratulate you on your success with your pair of jewel cichlids. *Hemichromis bimaculatus* is one of the old standbys of the aquarium fish hobby. It's also one of the most beautiful cichlids.

Jewel cichlids are widespread in their native habitat of southern Republic of Guinea south to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. They spawn readily in the home aquarium, produce a lot of fry and are therefore a mainstay of the hobby. While the coloration can vary a bit, courting pairs are usually spectacular with a bright red background and blue spots. They don't get very large (5 inches or so) and tolerate a wide range of water conditions. You chose a great cichlid fish to start with. The one drawback is that they can be pretty aggressive toward their tankmates and even their own mates.

I'll address your question about species to hybridize before offering suggestions about other beautiful cichlid fish to breed. I would never recommend anybody hybridize fish intentionally. To me, part of the beauty of fishkeeping is imagining where a fish comes from. Another point is that there's something like 25,000 species of fish in the world. Many can be kept in aquaria. They literally come in all shapes, colors and sizes. They reproduce in ways that you probably wouldn't even think of. Before you give up on all 25,000 species, why not do a little research and find new species that appeal to you? Reading *Aquarium Fish Internationalis* a great start. Asking questions like you've done here is even better.

For beautiful alternatives, there are at least two species of jewel cichlids that are smaller and less aggressive, the forest jewel (*Hemichromis lifalili*) and also *H. cristatus*. If you like West African fish but not jewels, consider any of the various species of fish under the heading of kribis. There are a number of species and all are attractive. Finally, if you'd like a big change, look into the cichlid fish from Lake Malawi. There are literally hundreds of species of Lake Malawi cichlid fish in colors from bright blue, greens, reds, yellow and black. Good luck with whatever fish you try.