

Breeding Apistogrammas

Apistogramma may not spawn for a number of reasons.

By Lee Newman

Q. I have a question concerning my Apistogramma borelli red mask. I successfully bred my apistos, then separated the male from the female. They were in a small aquarium, and she was chasing him mercilessly. I have since transferred him back to the breeding aquarium, but he acts uninterested. I don't know what to do. The temperature is 82 degrees Fahrenheit, and the pH is 7.0 — the same as when they last bred. She has colored up at least once, indicating she was ready to mate, and he ignored her then, as well. Can you think of anything that could be wrong or missing, or that I could do to encourage them to breed? Thank you.

Charlene Stanford

A. There might be a number of reasons why your Apistogramma borelli are not spawning at the moment, but the most common is that the male is simply not "in the mood." It is relatively common for a species of cichlid fish to spawn once, then not do it again for months — it is one of those old fish breeder curses. Fortunately, a number of tricks can be used to get the male to more enthusiastically appreciate his intended partner.

Perhaps the oldest trick is to wait for a low-pressure weather system to pass through your location, then do a 50-percent water change with water a few degrees cooler than the water in the aquarium. This works even better if you use water with a reduced conductivity level, such as distilled or de-ionized water or water that has been processed through a reverse osmosis unit. The idea is to lower the temperature and conductivity of the aquarium water at the same time that there is a drop in the ambient barometric pressure — all the things that happen when it rains in tropical South America where A. borelli is found.

If simulating a rainstorm in your aquarium does not help the situation, the problem might be behavioral. In small aquariums, Apistogramma males can easily have their egos badly shaken by an aggressive female tending her brood. The male may simply need a target to release some aggressive behavior toward, rather than being the target of it. In a small aquarium (10 or 20 gallons), you could add some small tetras to attract the male's aggression. Often having the male doing "male things" is all he needs to get back into the mood. In a larger aquarium, an additional female or a second pair of A. borelli would fit the bill even better because of the direct competition theory: individuals of the same or similar species elicit the most powerful responses because they require and compete for the same type of resources.

Another trick is to put the male in a suitable aquarium purposefully set-up for spawning, then add the female once the male has settled in. Again, this technique serves to offer the male an opportunity to be the dominant animal and allow him to express his natural behavior. Just make sure to provide the female with adequate hiding places, in case the male gets a little rough.

I'd try the rainstorm trick first, but be prepared — you may have a bruised ego to fix instead. Good luck with them.