

## Breeding Cichlids

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*By Lee Newman*

Q. I'm setting up a 72-gallon bowfront, and I'm wondering about the possibility of raising several different types of *Satanoperca* demonfish. I don't intend to breed them, and know that *Satanoperca leucosticta* and *Satanoperca daemon* are fairly docile. Can you recommend others, and do you think this is a workable plan?

Josette Perfetti

A. A collection of *Satanoperca* is a very workable plan for your aquarium. As I am sure you're aware, they are beautiful and interesting fish with a charm all their own, and, despite their size, they are among the most behaviorally manageable South American cichlid fish for the home aquarium.

If you do not intend to breed them, I suggest you keep single specimens of several different species. Under favorable conditions, cichlid fish will always want to do what comes naturally, but the chances of having two different species of *Satanoperca* successfully hybridize are slim, because many of the species have significant differences in the way they spawn.

As there are significant variations in spawning behaviors, there are also some variations with their sociability in aquariums. As you have already mentioned, *Satanoperca leucosticta* and *Satanoperca daemon* are relatively docile, but *Satanoperca jurupari* can be somewhat more assertive (although the attention is usually focused on members of its species). In the absence of other *Satanoperca jurupari* to chase, an individual may become more docile or pester the neighbors it does have. I think you'd be safe in adding one to the community, but you should keep a close eye on it. It might help to add it to the community last to reduce its potential aggression by letting the other fish establish themselves first.

As for other choices, there are three other valid species in the genus. *Satanoperca pappaterra*, from Bolivia, is relatively rare in the hobby. It's unlikely you'll find it at your favorite aquarium shop, though it is possible. It is very similar in behavior to its somewhat sporadically available relative, *Satanoperca jurupari*.

*Satanoperca lilith*, the "one-spot daemon" from the central Amazon basin, is extremely rare in the hobby - in fact, if you find any, let me know! Behaviorally, it is very similar to *Satanoperca daemon* and likely would mix with the other species.

Lastly, *Satanoperca acuticeps* is often available but is very difficult to keep. The problem stems from the fact that despite its current inclusion in the genus *Satanoperca*, its feeding behavior is remarkably different when compared to the other species in the genus. It is believed (and anecdotal observations in aquariums seem to confirm) that *Satanoperca acuticeps* is less adapted for sifting its meals from the substrate than for picking small organisms from the water column. This lifestyle tends to put it at a distinct disadvantage when trying to compete for fish food in a mixed community. In such situations, *Satanoperca acuticeps* tends to waste away, despite a regular feeding schedule. I think your single biggest challenge in putting a community of *Satanoperca* species together will be the distinct lack of availability of at least three of the choices.

Finally, I suggest that you restrict the population to three or four specimens. Any more than that and you'll eventually have problems maintaining water quality, especially as they approach 8 to 9 inches each. Also, make sure you offer fish food items that are relatively small, in comparison to the size of their mouths. Despite the fact that *Satanoperca* are relatively large cichlid fish by home aquarium standards, they eat surprisingly small items in the wild. A staple diet of easily consumed flake foods, frozen bloodworms and brine shrimp will go a long way in ensuring adequate nutrition. Best of luck with the demonfish!