

Deep Water Haplochromine

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By Paul V. Loisel

Q. I recently purchased two deep water Haplochromis. A friend told me they were called Haplochromis electra, but I would swear they match the color photo of Haplochromis phenochilus in your book, The Cichlid Aquarium. Which is the correct name for this fish and what can you tell me about its care and breeding?

A. At the time I wrote the original edition of The Cichlid Aquarium there was reason to believe that Haplochromis phenochilus Trewavas 1935 and Haplochromis electra Burgess 1979 were the same animal. Because zoologists operate under a set of procedural rules that customarily affords priority to the first published scientific name conferred upon an animal, *H. phenochilus* was judged to be the correct designation for the deepwater hap. However, in their revision of haplochromine cichlids native to Lake Malawi, Dr. Ethelwyn Trewavas and Dr. David Eccles demonstrated that *H. phenochilus* and *H. electra* are indeed distinct species. Inasmuch as they also proposed a new genus, *Placidochromis*, for the latter species and its near relatives, the correct scientific name for the deep water hap is *Placidochromis electra*.

P. electra is found in fairly deep water over open, sandy bottoms. It appears to feed primarily on aquatic invertebrates in nature. In captivity *P. electra* readily accepts any of the usual live, frozen or prepared foods offered to cichlids.

Males of this species can reach 7 inches standard length (nose to base of tail fin) under aquarium conditions. Sexually active males behave aggressively toward one another and will attempt to defend a breeding territory against other species. As with *Cyrtocara moorii*, another fairly "mellow" Malawi cichlid, the success of such efforts depends upon the temperament of any tankmates. Like other Malawi cichlids, *P. electra* requires moderately hard, alkaline water to prosper, and is very intolerant of dissolved waste build-up in its aquarium. Assuming the operation of an efficient filtration system and the willingness to change up to 75 percent of the tank's water volume every 10 to 14 days, this deep water hap is not difficult to maintain in captivity.

Following the pattern of other cichlids native to Lake Malawi, *P. electra* is an advanced maternal mouthbrooder. Like other cichlids with an openly polygamous mating system, it is best kept on a "harem" basis — one male housed with a group of two or more females. A single pair will also live compatibly in a community of behaviorally comparable Malawi cichlids, and can usually be expected to spawn successfully in such a setting. Males often hassle females for a day or two after spawning. It is thus a good idea to provide the female with several refuges to which she can retreat once spawning is completed.

Females are usually reliable parents. The incubation period lasts 21 days at 83 to 85 degrees Fahrenheit. Like most haplochromine cichlids, isolated female deep water haps will care for the fry long after their initial release from the mother's mouth, but the usual practice is to separate mother and young as soon as the latter are fully mobile. Newly mobile fry can take *Artemia nauplii* and finely powdered prepared foods for their initial meal. With ample feeding and frequent partial water changes, the easily reared fry grow rapidly and can be reliably sexed by about 12 weeks of age.