



TROPHEUS MOORI - YOU CAN'T GET TOO MANY!

by Howard Schmidt

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You can't get too many - that's what you say when you have *Tropheus*. No, it's not a new disease. But it's what you have if you love/adore the species as I do. When discussing the species, most people respond with, "They are nice fish - but I always lose them". The purpose of this article (my high school teachers always told me to write this) is to help the average hobbyist keep and breed this beautiful/unpredictable species. I will be dividing this article into the following parts:

Starting a Colony - How to get going
Feeding - Be careful!
Breeding - Watch closely!
Colour Morphs - Wow!

Starting a Colony

First - A definition. According to my trusted dictionary - A colony is a group of the same kind of animals or plants living or growing together. Definition according to Schmidt is - A colony is a group of three or more of the same species that have established a pecking order - or in other words - their own little society!

The first time I saw an adult *Tropheus moorii* was at the 1980 (yes - it says 1980!) American Cichlid Association (ACA) convention in Cleveland, Ohio. It was my first National Convention. I'll never forget standing in the show room - watching Greater Chicago (GCCA) member Bob Musso release a *T. moorii* 'Malgrazzi' into its new home. It was like no other fish in the room - despite a scant tank, foreign water, an extensive ride from Chicago - the fish had outstanding colour, fins, and body shape. I'll never forget it - it was the start of my *Tropheusitis*. It was also how to start a colony! Let me explain. You first need to establish an intense desire or love for this species. Once this crucial first step is completed - everything else will fall into place. Money will be no object. Tank space will not be a problem - you will sell most of your other fish to make room for your new colony(s) - or you will buy new tanks. You're on your way.

The next step is to buy some *Tropheus*. After many starts, failures, and many hundreds of dollars - I believe it best to obtain a minimum of ten but no more than 24 one-inch specimens. Ten fish should give you a fair number of females. Only one or two males should be kept in the colony, the remainder can be sold or held in reserve. I say no more than 24 because it starts to get not only real expensive (averages about \$10.00 an inch) (Editor's Note: for Australia read \$20.00 - \$35.00 an inch) but the appropriate tank size is very large for most hobbyists. I have seen limited success with tanks as small as 29 gallons - but I like to use nothing smaller than a 70 gallon for a small colony of ten to twelve individuals. Most successful breeders use tanks in excess of 120 gallons - but it is not a requirement for a small colony.

Once the fish are purchased from a reliable source, you are ready to start the *Tropheus* colony. You should try and limit the number of times that they are moved. Frequent changes will stress the fish and could cause changes to the all-important pecking order that will be established. So, if possible, I always try to select the tank that will serve as their eventual spawning tank or try to minimise their moves.

Feeding

The next step is what I do and I know several successful breeders do the same. That is - DO NOT FEED THE FISH! Time after time I've seen hobbyists start feeding as soon as the new colony has been housed. Everything will seem fine for two weeks to a month - then here it comes - the bloat. It has been suggested that *Tropheus* constantly carry the protozoa *Hexamita* in their intestines. The fish gets stressed - the protozoa takes over. Once the bloat starts, it is very hard to stop and the entire colony is at risk. Don't get fooled by their continuous begging for food. The first thing I do instead of feeding is a prophylactic (preventative) treatment of Clout™ - for four days. After four days do a 50% water change and begin very small twice a day feeding of Tetra™ Medicated food - for parasitic diseases. Feed this exclusively for seven to ten days. Make another 50% water change then begin regular feeding. I feed mostly green flake, twice a day, with Cichlid Excel fed on an irregular basis. Remember that *Tropheus* are algae scrapers in the wild - thus care must be taken when considering high protein foods such as Brine Shrimp or worms. Rene Kruter (Pers. Comm.) indicates that Vitamin C is the key to avoiding stress in *Tropheus*. Professional European breeders select foods high in Vitamin C and report excellent success in avoiding stress and subsequent bloat.

Breeding

It is very rewarding to patiently raise a colony for two years, watch the adults mature - and then observe as the large dominant male kills the females - NOT! After this much of an investment - it is time to be careful! There should be a close daily inspection - look for torn fins, missing scales, etc. or fish that stay up at the top of the tank. To avoid aggression, the fish will always head to the upper one inch of tank space. They will be incapable of finding a hiding spot - no matter how many are supplied. The aggressor will hunt them until they drop. So what I do - I supply no caves and no spots to hide. All flower pots are turned upside down with an entrance on the top and an exit in the middle. The fish constantly swim in one end and out the other. One pot at each end of the tank - that's all. But - here is the key - I supply several six inch pieces of floating PVC pipe. They are anchored with nylon string to avoid travelling around the tank. When the aggressor attacks, the fish head for the pipe and the aggressor stops without going in the pipe. I don't understand it - but it works. When things calm down the pipe can be removed - just keep a close watch and return the pipe when needed.

If you keep *Tropheus* healthy - they will eventually spawn. I usually let them brood for approximately two weeks. The female will continue to eat during this period, so I don't feel that they lose much condition. The fry are then placed in an old filter box that has been drilled with many holes to ensure a good flow of water. It is then hung in the parents' spawning tank with either an airstone or a Tetra™ filter outlet spilling into the box. When moving the fry, I will always move them to a tank containing 100% of their original water, just to be safe.

Colour Morphs

There are many, many colour morphs of *T. moorii* available - another reason why they are so desirable. New varieties are still being discovered and makes one constantly check for the latest and the greatest. There were twenty seven varieties for sale in the January 1994 ACA (American Cichlid Association) Trading Post. Pictures can be seen in the standard reference books - such as the Lexicon of Cichlids from TFH.