

## *Apistogramma Panduro – The “Other” Panda*

*Article by: BigDaddy*

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**Apistogramma Panduro Male**

My initial foray into the world of dwarf cichlids started with a beautiful set of *Mikrogeophagus ramirezi* at the local aquarium store that beckoned me to bring them home. This colourful, feisty little dwarf cichlid from Venezuela and Columbia had quickly captured my attention. Soon, I was learning more and more about German Blue Rams, and then, by extension, dwarf cichlids in general. The idea of having fish with the behavioural flare of cichlids without the huge tanks most of my African-loving brethren owned appealed to my need for minimal amounts of required floor space. Apistos seemed to be a good fit for my desire to have a variety of species without having to convert the family living spaces into fish living spaces with family as the secondary occupants.

The municipal water supply gave me yet another reason to try my hand at apistos. Living in a valley surrounded by wooded hills and a fast flowing river, the tap water has a neutral to slightly acid pH and the hardness of the water is almost non-existent. Routinely, my tap water measures 6.8 or 7 out of the tap, with a gH of less than 2 degrees and a kH of 1 degree or less. I could house most species of apistos with little or no need to modify my water to successfully raise, and even breed, apistogramma.

Once again, I was off to the local fish store, a store I knew routinely carried a decent array of dwarves. Yet again, it was a colourful flash that drew my eye to a tank full of fish ranging in size from  $\frac{1}{2}$  to  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an inch. The caudal fin of these fish had a striking red border along its outer edge that made me look further. The tank was labelled “A. pandurini – tank raised”. Perfect. These were likely locally bred fish that would acclimate to my tank in quick measure. I bagged up a pair and brought them home.

I did all the pre-requisite reading on my new acquisitions. These were a large-bodied apisto, being a member of the popular *cacatuoides* group. I particularly appreciated that while they were still a “dwarf”, I wouldn’t have to squint into the tank to find my livestock. One of the panduro’s common names is “New Panda”, since *A. nijsseni*, after which the complex is named, already holds the common name of “Dwarf Panda”. I definitely consider *A. panduro* to be one of the most colourful of the apistos. It has a sky blue body, bold yellow accents on its ventral fins, and a

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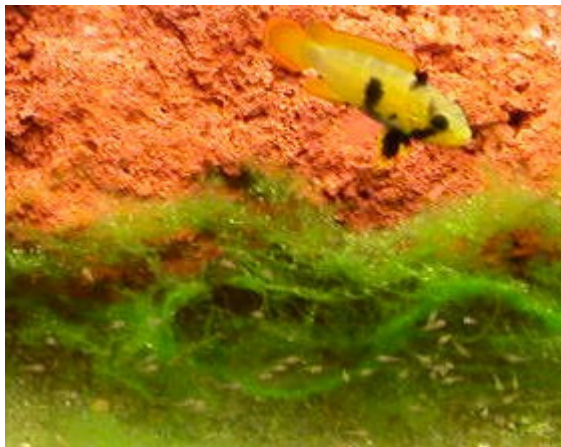
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blue caudal fin with a cherry red border along its outer edge. Being a black water species, I would have no worries keeping it in my naturally soft, acidic water.

I enjoyed my panduros immensely over the months, but soon a move was on the way. With a young family and other more pressing concerns, most of my livestock was sold off to facilitate the transition to the new home – including my panduros.

Shortly after settling in, though, I was yearning for panduros again. This time, not only was my intent to keep them, but to breed this attractive, robust fish. I had found what I considered the perfect tank for them. A blow-out sale of a store which had burnt down a few months back was moving the last of the inventory which had escaped the flames. For a mere \$30 CDN, a new 23 gallon long tank measuring 36 x 12 x 12 seemed like the ideal space. It would have lots of available real estate for a male and a few females to claim territories in, yet small enough that only a minimum sized heater, filter and light would be needed to handle it all.

Off to my favourite fish store yet again, where I am on a first name basis with the manager and most of the staff. Having been given the inside scoop on a new delivery that the store has recently gotten, I felt a bit like a kid at Christmas. Wild caught panduros! This time, I bagged up 6 of them: one clearly a nice mature male, another fairly mature female, and four others that would have to be grown out before they could really be sexed properly.



**Female guards fry grazing on hair algae**

The tank setup they were introduced to was relatively bare. No substrate, three larger lava rocks forming a makeshift cave and a massive clump of java moss that filled at least a third of the tank. An Eheim internal filter sat at in one corner o the tank, while an AquaClear 300 on its lowest setting sat in the opposite corner. I had very few aggression issues as the panduros grew out, mostly because of the instant cover of the java moss for anyone in need of a quick hiding spot. Eventually, I was able to determine I had two males, and four females. As they were growing out, I kept my eye out for aggression, specifically looking for fish cowering in the corners or other tell tale signs of being beaten up. Other tanks stood in the waiting for new arrivals, as I knew eventually some fish would have to be moved over. A diet of a good quality flake, with an occasional treat of frozen bloodworms or brine shrimp, was more than enough for the smaller fish to double in size in a matter of a few weeks. Water changes were weekly or bi-weekly, as time allowed. As the fish continued to grow out, I started thinking about getting a pair into their own breeding tank. The panduros, however, had other plans.

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Returning home from work one day, I was saddened to see the younger of the two males dead in the tank. He had fed normally in the morning, and the two males seemed to have staked out their own territories well, so there wasn't any heavy aggression to attribute it to. Yet there he was, badly beaten up and stuck to the filter intake. While I was removing him from the tank, what had transpired over the course of the day became immediately clear.

The mature female was now a dazzling yellow. She and the older male were now confined to the partial cover of the lava rocks. Any female who ventured over to that side of the tank was quickly forced back into the cover of the moss. The pair had spawned, and were now viciously defending the clutch of eggs hidden somewhere in the rockwork.

I throttled the filters back to their lowest output settings to safeguard the soon-to-be free swimmers. By week's end, the female had now moved the wrigglers onto a patch of the rock within view. There were about 3 dozen newly hatched fry. As soon as they became free swimming, they were fed a commercial fry food as a staple. Their principle food, however, was the teeming mass of infusoria to be found in the java moss and to a lesser extent, on the lava rock. I would watch the female escort the fry to a patch of moss, the fry grazing at their leisure, all the while the parents ensuring the other apistos in the tank kept their distance.



**Parents and fry at 2 1/2 weeks**

After about a month, the female had basically given up on herding the fry together. Over the next few weeks, the fry had grown from  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{3}{8}$  inch in size. At this point, the male “turned” on the female, forcing her out of their territory.

It's been two months since the wrigglers made their presence known. The male is now defending the same territory with another female. The fry, which now swim all over the tank, will be collected into a grow-out tank where their diet can be more closely controlled. I plan on feeding live brine shrimp; vinegar eels and commercial “growth formula” crumble to bring these young ones to maturity. I'll be bringing these guys to the local aquarium club auction, so other's can get bitten by the apisto bug and enjoy these great little fish as much as I have.