



Ottawa Valley Aquarium Society
ovas.ca

Newsletter Summer 2010

Talking about Cichlids: [The OCA Extravaganza 2010](#) will take place from 19-21 November.

Content

- 2 [Editorial - Garage Sale and Cichlids](#)
- 3 [The resilient and surprising *Otopharynx tetrastigma*](#)
- 8 [Upcoming Events](#)

Do you have an area of interest you love to talk about, or find yourself answering a lot of questions about from friends or forum members, even total strangers? Please tell me about it - I'd love to include your article. And if writing's not your thing, let me interview you, or just give me the relevant facts and let me write the article. For this newsletter to be full of great information I need your expertise. I know nothing about discus breeding, setting up a fowlr tank, or CO2 dosing, to name only a few. Send your email to newsletter@ovas.ca or PM me on the board.

The Ottawa Valley Aquarium Society (OVAS) is a non-profit, educational, and recreational organization. It has four main objectives:

- to further the study of all forms of aquatic life,
- to promote interest, exchange ideas, and distribute information concerning the hobby,
- to encourage breeding and displaying of aquatic life,
- and to work toward the conservation of endangered species.

OVAS is a member of the Canadian Association Of Aquarium Clubs.

OVAS club meetings are held at **7pm on every 4th Monday** of the month. Everybody is welcome! Meetings take place at the **J.A. Dulude Arena - Mel Baker Hall**, located at **941 Clyde Avenue**.

Please note that there are no meetings in December (Xmas), July and August (summer break).

Editorial

What a summer, eh? We broke every heat record in the books, and were all fanning our fish tanks 24/7. Or something to that effect.

Plus we had a smashing OVAS BBQ:



Many thanks to anyone who came out.

Now, let's talk fish, Cichlids, to be exact. André Martin [ajm1961] was kind enough to share his experiences in the form of the wonderful article on page 3. He's available for questions or comments via PM on the forum. Thank you very much, André.

In other news, the second OVAS Garage Sale is coming up very soon, so climb down into your basement and dust off that box of treasures you've been collecting since last year. To reserve a table, please PM Peter Garneau [garnpet]. There will be room for 15 tables - first come first served. We hope you'll have a great time, find what you came for and get a chance to chat with people you haven't seen in a while.

And, last not least, it will be our first meeting of the season on September 27th. Peter Lim, our new program director would like you all to bring in pictures or short videos and show us your tanks. PM him [limmer] on the forum for more information.

He will also have fishbowls for anyone interested in a little friendly aquascaping competition. You will have time scape those nanos until the November meeting, when the bowls will be judged.

Don't forget that your memberships expire at the end of September, so this will be your last chance to renew, outside of the website!

Creature comforts,
Anja Krebber

The resilient and surprising Otopharynx tetrastigma

By André Martin [ajm1961], OVAS member since February 2009

It all started last January 2010, when someone posted 'Fry for sale' in the OVAS Classifieds. Scanning the list of the sellers' available fish, I took immediate notice of the 'White Tail' (Pseudotropheus) Acei and 'Ngara Flametail Peacocks' (Aulonocara Stuartgranti). I had a few of the regular 'yellow tail' Acei species and thought the black variety could be a nice addition to my 135 gallon tank. As for the Ngara Flametails, I had one male and was eager to have a few more of this spectacular looking cichlid. And then my eye caught the listing: Otopharynx Tetrastigma. I had never heard of this one before. What did it look like? Was it anything like my mature Yellow Blaze Lithobates? I had to research this species.



Otopharynx tetrastigma
© www.Paradise-Malawi-Cichlids.com

A quick Google search provided some stunning pictures. Wow! What an attractive fish! Its head has a nice green sheen, its body covered in various shades of green, blue, and yellow scales, and all of it crowned by red and white dorsal, caudal and anal fins. But it seemed somewhat familiar. Wasn't that the fish that won a prize at a recent tropical fish convention? I traced back the link in my browser history: 2008 Minnesota Aquarium Society Tropical Fish Show Results. My suspicion was correct - it was the first place winner in the Lake Malawi Haplochromis category. But, it was described as *Tramitichromis intermedius*? Confused, I searched some more about both these species. It appeared as though there was some controversy in the trade, but more about this later.



'*Tramitichromis intermedius*'
First Place Winner, 2008 Minnesota
Aquarium Society Tropical Fish Show
Show entry by Bob Randall

I decided that whatever it was called, this fish was definitely worth a try! So, I ordered 4 black aceis, 2 flametails, and 4 tetrastigmas.

The first surprise

It turned out that the vendor was all out of black aceis, much to my chagrin, but he had brought the flametails and tetrastigmas. Once the transaction was completed, I opened the bags in the comfort and heat of my van (it was January after all), and gently poured the fry and their water into my container. In hindsight, I should have kept them in the bag. With the fry in their new temporary home, I went to pick up a few supplies.

This is when I found out about the resilience of *Otopharynx tetrastigma*. Having spent about 20 or 30 minutes in the store, I returned to the van to have a look at the fry and see how they were doing. I counted two flametails, and three tetrastigmas. THREE? Panicked I counted them again. Then it dawned on me, could one have stayed in the bag? I frantically searched for the bags, discarded at the bottom of the Styrofoam box. Oh no! One small fish remained, stuck inside one of the bags. And it was STILL ALIVE?! I quickly scooped it out and put in the container to join the rest of the group. It swam okay, no floating or disorientation.

How could a fish live for so long in a bag with only a few droplets of water? This was one tough fish! I could barely believe it!

Once at home, I transferred the fish into a 20 gallon tank that I had cycled for the occasion. And there they stayed for a few months until they were big enough to join the more mature cichlid community in my 135 gallon tank.

The second surprise

When the time came to do the transfer, I got my second surprise with the *Otopharynx tetrastigma*. I had removed most of the fake plants and rocks from the 20 gallon tank in order to make it easier to scoop up the juveniles with a net. I decided to transfer just two of the fish to see how they would adapt in the larger tank – just in case. So, I started to chase them around the tank with my net. I managed to scoop one, then two. It was no easy task; these fish really move! Having caught two, I looked in the tank for the remaining two fish. I could only see one. WHAT? I looked in my pail – nope, only two there. Oh no (again), could one have jumped out of the tank? I looked around the stand, looked at every plant and rock I had taken out and did not see the missing fish. I then removed the few remaining rocks in the tank. I stared into the tank for a few minutes. Could the missing fish be behind the heater or filter intake? I looked everywhere, but in vain. I transferred the two caught fish into the big tank. I returned to the 20 gallon and replaced the rocks and plants.

Later in the day, as I peered into the 20 gallon to see how the remaining fish was doing, there were TWO fish! How was this possible? I shook my head and again, thanked my good luck.

After a few weeks in the big tank, the two tetrastigmas had adapted well to the community – so, it was time to transfer the other two. I proceeded in the same fashion as the last time, removing plants and rocks before chasing the two fish with my net. And this is when I got my answer to the mystery of the missing fish. As I chased the two fish I noticed some of the substrate was being disturbed, like a small burst. At that point I could only see one fish in the tank. I finally scooped it up and put it my pail. Now, where was the second one? I moved all the remaining rocks out of the tank and stared inside. No fish. At this point I wondered: **is it possible that the fish could have buried itself in the substrate?** I carefully sifted the fine sand with my net, and VOILA! The last and largest of the group of four quickly shook itself out of the sandy bottom! I finally managed to scoop it up and put it in my pail.

This fish stayed in the substrate for minutes! I have never witnessed this before; I was completely flabbergasted. Again, the *Otopharynx tetrastigma* displayed its incredible resilience. Since then, my group of four have thrived in the 135 gallon, growing to about 2 inches each. I can't determine the sexes until the male(s) start to color. I can't wait!



Pictures of *Otopharynx* juveniles in my aquarium

The species controversy

Since I have acquired these fish, I have been somewhat obsessed with understanding

the differences between the *Otopharynx tetrastigma* and the *Tramitichromis intermedius*. Are they the same fish? My research has been a bit frustrating, as the question has been raised in several cichlid forums. Here are some examples:

Cichlid-Forum

There are two profiles posted for *Tramitichromis intermedius*. The first one shows a species that is mainly blue with yellowish fins. The other looks identical to pictures found on the internet for *O. tetrastigma*. In this second profile, they state: "This fish trades in the aquarium hobby as *Tramitichromis intermedius*, yet it is believed to be not so. The blotches are more or less on the middle of the flank, unlike the true *intermedius* where they occur higher on the body. The snout is also more or less straight instead of rounded like in the true *T. intermedius*. It is not known if this is a naturally occurring fish, or the result of an accidental hybridization."



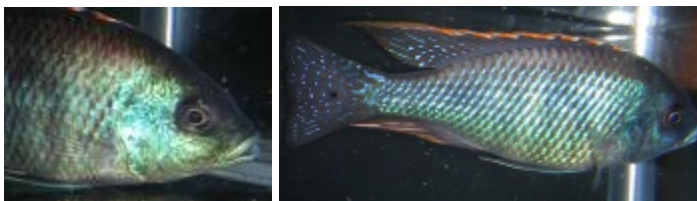
Tramitichromis intermedius - First profile
Picture © Greg Ward



Tramitichromis intermedius - Second profile
Picture © D. Gruhlke

East-Coast Cichlids Forum / Cichlid Room Companion Forum

In this forum, Wally Cox, a member of the Greater Pittsburgh Aquarium Society, started a thread about the confusion between the two species. In one of his posts, he asks: "At ACA 2000 in Cleveland, I bought 8 juveniles from a Florida fish farmer. They were calling them *Lethrinops intermedius*. A year or two later they changed them to *Tramiticranus intermedius*. Last summer I purchased 10 1-inch *Otopharynx tetrastigma* at the Youngstown auction. Today my group are ready to start spawning. This new group is identical to the group of *intermedius* I had years ago. Did someone just change the name because they thought it was a different species for selling purposes or is it really the species I got rid of years ago?"



Male pictured in aquarium
Pictures used with permission from Wally Cox, Pittsburgh PA



Tramitichromis sp. "Unknown"
this species is often sold as
Tramitichromis intermedius,
but it is not the true
intermedius
Dave Schumacher

Picture and text used with permission
from Dave Schumacher
(www.davesfish.com)

Later in this thread, after discussing the issue with Dave Schumacher, owner of Dave's Rare Aquarium Fish, a forum moderator ("emartin") stated: "Dave actually picked up a bunch of F1 REAL *Tramitichromis intermedius*, and even at 1" they look nothing AT ALL like the false *Intermedius*. So I think we should all just from now on call "*Lethrinops intermedius*" and "*Tramitichromis intermedius*" (unless you are certain you have the real thing) *Otopharynx tetrastigma* until the Florida pond guys correct themselves." In response to the question also being asked in The Cichlid Room Companion forum, Dave posted a photograph and explanation, as seen above.

So what are the profiles of these two fish? Are they truly distinct species? Here is a summary of my findings from various sources on the Internet, with pictures courtesy of Ad Konings' book, *The Cichlids of Lake Malawi, Third Edition*:

Otopharynx tetrastigma was described initially as *Chromis Tetrastigma*, by Albert Günther in 1893. It is found mainly in shallow vegetated areas in the southern part of Lake Malawi, Lake Malombe and in the upper Shire River. It sifts through the muddy sediment for invertebrates such as insect larvae and small crustaceans. The males can reach about 16 cm (6.5") and females somewhat less.

O. tetrastigma is evaluated by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species as Least Concern (2006). In fact, in recent studies of fishery catches in Lake Malombe, the *tetrastigma* was one of five species that contributed to more than 60% of the total catch composition by weight.

As part of the *Otopharynx* genus, it is characterized by the presence of three distinct spots that do not extend past the dorsum (or lateral line), and by moderately stout bicuspid oral jaw teeth in its outer series. While the spots may be faded on a male in breeding dress, they are visible on females and juveniles.



Otopharynx tetrastigma - Male pictured at Thumbi East Island, Malawi.
© Ad Konings



Female pictured at Thumbi East Island, Malawi
© Ad Konings

Tramitichromis intermedius is a little-known species that was originally described under the name of *Lethrinops intermedius* by Trewavas in 1935. Its maximum total length is approximately 14 cm (5½ inches).

The lower jaw of *T. intermedius* has large sensory pores, much larger than in any other *Tramitichromis* species. This feature, and in particular its pigmentation pattern, correspond more with the definition of the genus *Trematocranus*. One of its export tradenames is "Lethrinops small green".

T. intermedius is normally found singly or in small groups foraging over sediment-covered sand in shallow water. It feeds on insect larvae and other soft invertebrates. *T. intermedius* has a lake-wide distribution. Breeding males defend small pits in the mud or sand as territory.



Tramitichromis intermedius - Male in aquaria
© Ad Konings



Female pictured at Cobwe, Mozambique
© Ad Konings

As you can see there are strong resemblances in the colored males. However, one distinguishing point is the spots on the female and in some juveniles. The spots on *Tramitichromis* can saddle the dorsal area, whereas in *Otopharynx*, the spots normally do not extend past the dorsal lateral line. In asking for permission to use his photos for this article, Ad Konings graciously offered this additional bit of information to distinguish these two species:

"Apart from the differences in melanin pattern, in the lake *T. intermedius* has a much deeper body than *O. tetrastigma* and a rounder snout profile. Males in color of *T. intermedius* always have a golden patch on the head, at least in the lake. The latter may be less visible in aquarium populations. Again in the lake *O. tetrastigma* has a much pointier snout compared to *T. intermedius*, but of course that only "works" when you can compare the two side by side."

One way or another, both these species are very attractive fish to have in your aquarium. I hope this article was useful to you - happy fish keeping!

References and links:

The Cichlids of Lake Malawi, Third Edition
Ad Konings, Cichlid Press
<http://www.cichlidpress.com/>

Paradise Malawi Cichlids - *Otopharynx tetrastigma*
http://www.paradise-malawi-cichlids.com/visu.php?sexe=mâle&titre=Otopharynx_tetrastigma<i>-rare-</i>&illus=./illus/1235239530.jpg

2008 Minnesota Aquarium Society Tropical Fish Show Results
<http://www.minnfish.com/forum/viewtopic.php?t=9236>

Cichlid-Forum, Profiles for *Tramitichromis intermedius*
<http://www.cichlid-forum.com/profiles/species.php?id=2601>
<http://www.cichlid-forum.com/profiles/species.php?id=1279>

East Coast Cichlids, topic: *Otopharynx tetrastigma* or *Tramiticranus intermedius*
<http://forums.eastcoastcichlids.org/showthread.php?t=1804>

The Cichlid Room Companion, topic: *Otopharynx tetrastigma* or *Tramitichromis intermedius*
www.cichlidae.com/forum/viewtopic.php?p=40519

The Cichlid Room Companion, *Otopharynx tetrastigma* profile
<http://www.cichlidae.com/gallery/species.php?s=1043>

NISC - African Journal of Aquatic Science 2004, An assessment of the nkacha net fishery of Lake Malombe, Malawi
<http://www.nisc.co.za/oneAbstract?absId=1412>

African Cichlid Forum, Topic: *Otopharynx tetrastigma*
<http://www.africancichlidforum.com/forums/index.php?showtopic=8367>

Malawi Dream, Profiles of *T. intermedius* and *O. tetrastigma*
http://www.malawi-dream.info/Tramitichromis_intermedius.htm
http://www.malawi-dream.info/Otopharynx_tetrastigma.htm

Malawi Mayhem, Profiles of *T. intermedius* and *O. tetrastigma*
http://www.malawimayhem.com/profile_show.php?id=281
http://www.malawimayhem.com/profile_show.php?id=391

Upcoming events

September

25th, Sunday, 10am-1pm - **2010 OVAS Garage Sale and Membership Drive**
Tables can be reserved at a cost of \$10 for a full table or \$5 for a half table - you can rent more than 1 table. Payment is due on Saturday before you setup your items. There is no item registration for this event. You will be responsible for labeling your items and handling all cash transactions.
The sale starts at 10am, you can bring your items to the room starting at 9am. You do not need to be an OVAS member to sell items at this event. However, we reserve the right to 'harass' you into buying one.

27th, Monday, 7pm - General Club Meeting
Last chance to buy your new membership!

We would like people to bring in pictures or a short video on a USB stick or disk and tell us a little bit about their tanks, like, how big it is, what you keep in it, at what temperature, that sort of thing. We will have a laptop available. Big or small, we would like to see them all. Please let Peter Lim know per PM[limmer] how much time you think you will need, so that he can coordinate the evening.

There will be Pizza available for dinner.

We will hand out bowls to all members which you can landscape anyway you like, plants, rocks, freshwater, salt, and any suitable water critters; use your imagination. Participation is strongly encouraged! The best aquascapes will be chosen in November

Please note that due to the garage sale we will NOT be holding a mini-auction at the September meeting.

October

25th, Monday, 7pm - General Club Meeting
Topic pending - please check back on our website

November

22nd, Monday, 7pm - General Club Meeting
Remember those bowls you were given in September? Sparkle them up, clip the plants, now is the time to bring them in and present them to be judged.
Please check back on our website for more information closer to the date

Many thanks to our sponsors: Aqua Valley, Big Al's Aquarium Services, Fish Tail Aquariums, Forty Fathoms, La Niche, Marinescape Aquarium, Ottawa Inverts, Ray's Marine Livestock & Aquatic Supplies, Reef Gate
--