

Chalinochromis sp. ndobhoi.

A CDAS Tank Talk article by Laurie Chan

The genus Chalinochromis

The genus *Chalinochromis* described in 1989 by Pierre Brichard are thick-lipped, cave-dwelling and spawning cichlids from lake Tanganyika similar in body shape, behaviour and feeding style to the closely related *Julidochromis* genus.

There are two described species of *Chalinochromis*; *brichardi* and *popelini*, and at least two undescribed species including the *ndobhoi*.

The thick-lipped mouth allows the fish to feed on soft bodied sponges and invertebrates in rocky biocovers, a taste preference almost exclusive to the *Chalinochromis* and *Julidochromis*. The lack of competition over food source means these two genera have carved out a niche in virtually every rock pile in the lake.



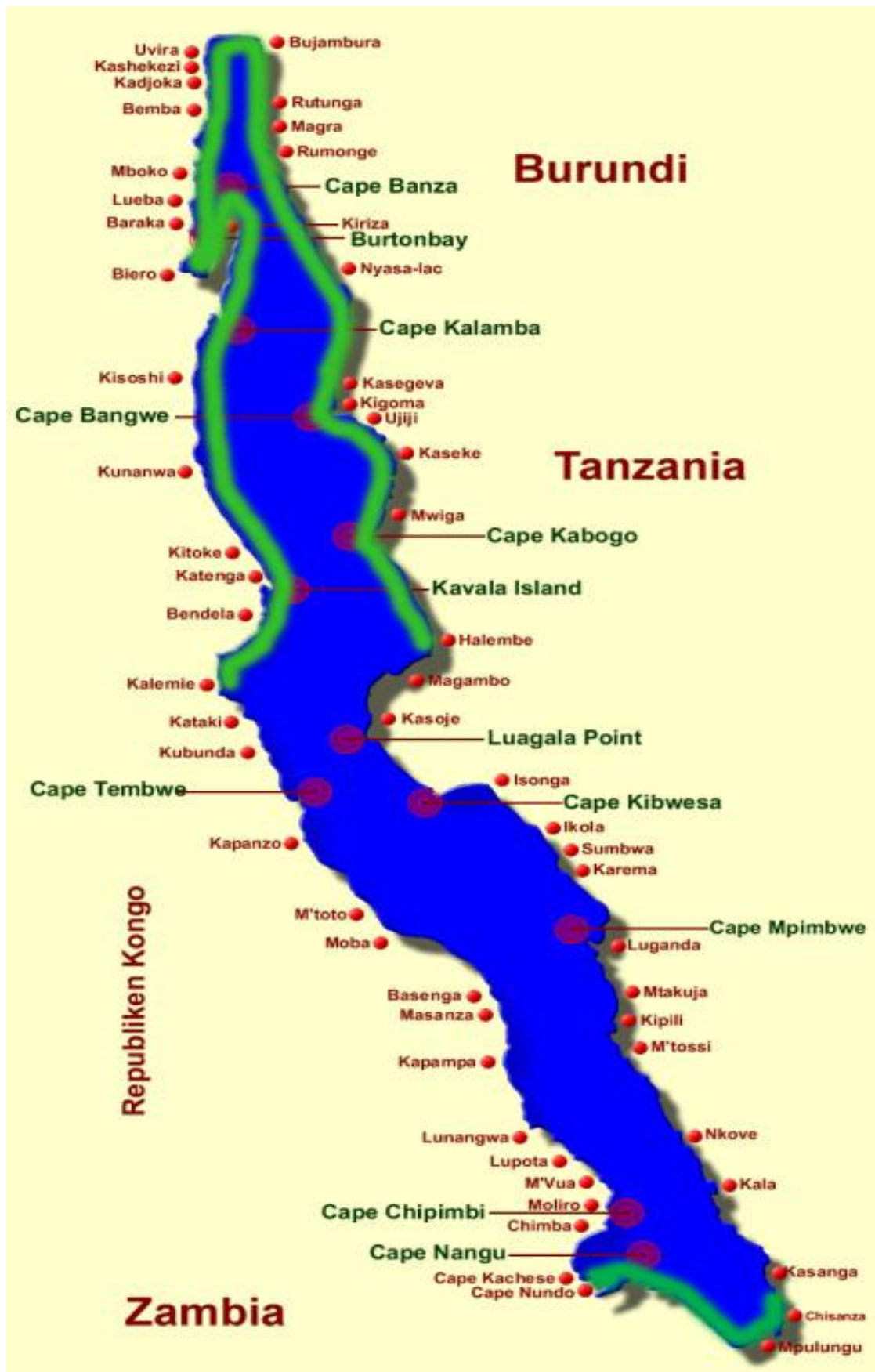
Figure 1 Chalinochromis sp. ndobhoi female in spawning cave showing thick warty lips



Figure 2 and with a different shade of lippy

Chalinochromis brichardi

The *Chalinochromis brichardi* species, described in 1974 by Poll, occur in a broad region in the north of the lake from Kalemie in the Congo, including Burundi where the first specimen was described and down to Halembe in Tanzania and a separate area in the southern tip from Kechese in Zambia, nearly to Kasanga in Tanzania.



As adults the fish have fairly plain body markings but a distinct bridle-like patterning around the head and face.



Figure 3 Chalinochromis brichardi (from cichlidlovers.com <http://www.cichlidlovers.com/c-brichardi.JPG>)

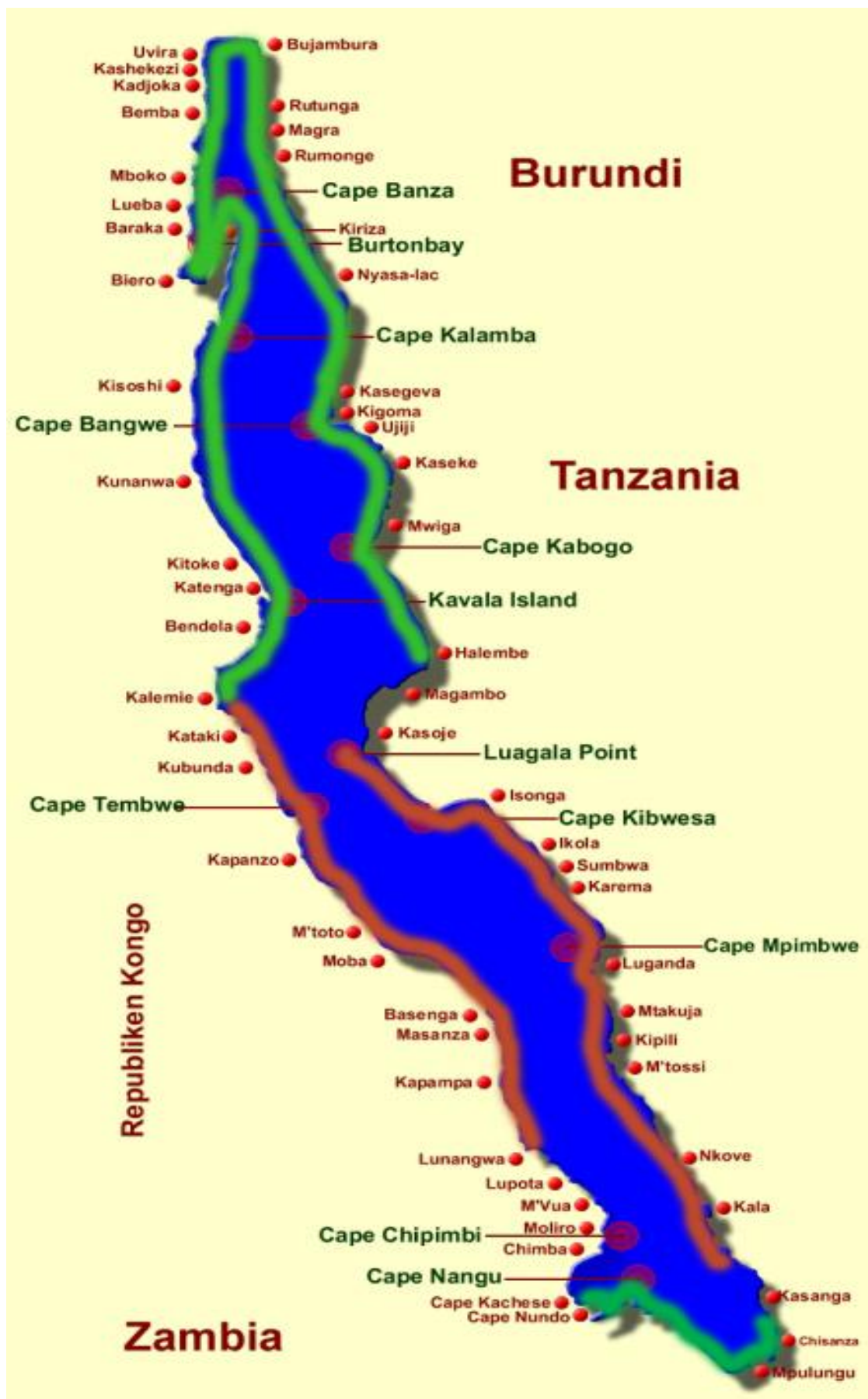
Rather curiously the brichardi are the only Chalinochromis species listed on the allowable-imports list where their entry states “Chalinochromis brichardi, bridles morph only, with minimum length 5cm” yet there seem to be very few actually coming into the country and even less being bred.

My guess in regard to the specification of the brichardi species in the import lists is that this must be based on the pre-1989 literature before the popelini species was described and AQIS are running 20 or so years behind in the paperwork.

In practice the importers and inspectors behave as if the genus as a whole are importable (other than not bothering to import the species actually listed) which makes practical sense as the juveniles of brichardi change their patterning and go through phases where only their mothers could tell them from the other unlisted species and environmental sense as the behaviour and characteristics of the entire genus are pretty consistent.

Chalinochromis popelini

Chalinochromis popelini (also known as *C. bifrenatus*), described by Pierre brichard in 1989 occur in the central and southern portion of the lake from Kalemie down to Lunangwa in the Congo and from Kasoje in Tanzania down nearly to Kasanga in Zambia.



The adult of the species is identifiable by two black lines along the length of the body hence the synonym “bifrenatus” as well as a bridle-like patterning around the head and face common to the genus.



Figure 4 Chalinochromis popelini (taken from Dave Midgeleys SydneyCichlid.com website)

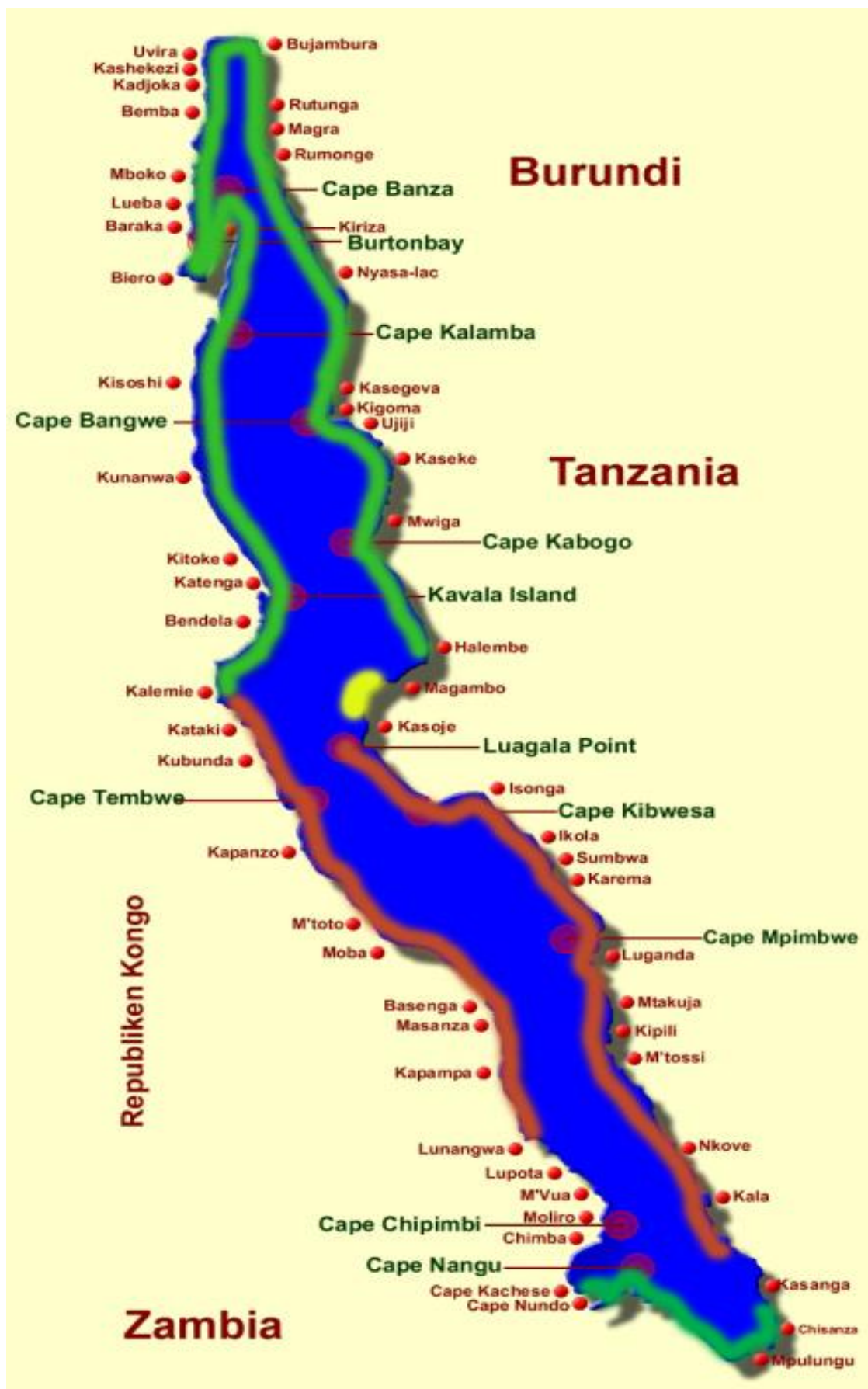


Figure 5 Chalinochromis popelini (taken from an advertisement by Michael Gibson on the ACE forums)

Popelini get imported into Australia from time to time and are available from breeders and some LFS.

Chalinochromis sp. Ndobhoi

Chalinochromis sp. ndobhoi are an undescribed species of Chalinochromis from a small region on the eastern side of the lake from Bulu point down to Kasoje in Tanzania including Karilani island.



The species is characterized by a sequence of black dots along the side of the body where popelini have stripes.
Juvenile brichardi have similar dots in one of their juvenile phases but not as adults.



Figure 6 Chalinochromis sp. ndobhoi female

Acquiring specimens

Chalinochromis sp. *ndobhoi* are on the IUCN conservation list because (I presume?) they're uncommon worldwide and especially in Australia.

Old timers say they've been around but I hadn't seen or heard of them here in the time I've been keeping cichlids so my interest was piqued when I heard aquapets had some wild-caught specimens.

The enthusiasm waned a tad when I heard the price at a little more than \$100 each but ended up deciding someone had to "take one for the team" so with fish boxes in the boot we set off to partake in the quarantine room opening festivities during which I loaded up with what I hoped was two pairs of *ndobhoi*.

Home Alone

I set the fish up in a 2'x18"x18" quarantine tank but there was quite a bit of stress and torn fins so after just a fortnight they moved in with my F1 *Kitumba Frontosa* colony in a 6'x2'x18" tank where there was enough space to get away from each other.

In this tank they seemed quite happy mixing and interacting with each other so I left them to get along and hopefully pair up.

I didn't expect them to breed in a tank with *Frontosa* and was really just hoping to see them pair up but was surprised one day to notice little babies hugging the rocks in one end of the tank.

Breeding

It appears that *ndobhoi* form relatively temporary pair bonds and don't mind the occasional bit of wife swapping between batches of fry..

Most of the time the adults are happy to just get around with the "gang" and then when the urge arrives a pair will form and they'll go off to do a bit of nuptial caving.

My females showed a distinct preference for a shallow, flat cave big enough for the female to turn around in but small enough for her to protect. On the ceiling of the cave she'd lay what appeared to be 50-100 eggs, presumably fertilized by the male from the entrance.

The newly hatched wrigglers attach themselves to the cave ceiling for several days looking like mosquito larvae.

Whilst this is going on the male hovers protectively above the cave chasing away any visitors bigger than a few centimetres (up to and including *Frontosa* sized) but only for a relatively small zone so his drinking buddies are relatively safe as long as they keep down the other end of the tank or hide in some floating tubing.



Figure 7 Mum with buns in the oven and Dad keeping a watchful eye on proceedings

At a little less than 1cm in size the fry come out of the cave and spread out, keeping very close to the rock surfaces for safety



Figure 8 The Chalinocreche in operation

Off to School

When the youngsters get to around 1.5 to 2cm in size the parents stop paying attention to them or each other and everyone one goes their own way.

It appears that the parents separate at this point and neither of them pay any attention to the children, which probably suits all the teenage fry as they're not paying any attention the old fogies anyway.

I lost the female from my first pair at this point as I'd partitioned the pair into a relative small section of the tank to stop predation on the fry by my frontosa and hadn't allowed enough space for them to get through the divorce proceedings without mishap.

The male joined up with the other two fish and a month or so later paired up with the other female for a little caving activity; a few months later again she bred with the other male.

Not so Swingin' society?

I was getting the idea that ndobhoi society must be pretty swingy and wife swappy at about this point but then found one of the males had jumped the tank so maybe it was just a brief fling that had to end ... like the 60's

The remaining pair have settled down into a regular and relatively peaceful routine though you'll note in that last picture that the male, despite being bigger has torn and tatty fins. I'm not sure if this is representative of the species, whether he's a bit clumsy whilst zooming in and around the rocks or whether this is just a particularly equal-rightsy female with martial arts training.

Every 6 or 7 weeks they get together for a bit of caving, spend a week hatching them, a couple of weeks looking after them and then a brief bit of stropiness before ignoring each other for a month while they catch up on some tv shows, read a book or whatever it is they do in their spare time then ...do it all again.

Try 'em you'll like 'em

The ndobhoi are "pretty" fish in an understated way, graceful in the way they glide around the rocks interspersed with amazingly quick bursts of speed and are appealing in the way they protect their babies against all comers.

I highly recommend them to anyone able to provide a suitable rocky Tanganyikan aquascape for them.

Husbandry Details

Size	Males: 10-13cm; Females: 9-11cm
Water Conditions	Lake Tanganyikan (Ph: 8.0 – 9.0, temperature: 24-27C, Gh, 9-19dH)
Habitat	Rock/Rubble piles with lots of caves
Taxonomy	Species: Chalinochromis sp. ndobhoi, Genus: Chalinochromis, family: Cichlidae
Aggression	<p>To Conspecifics: mildly aggressive at various stages of their breeding cycle but they protect a fairly small zone so in a tank of reasonable size it should be easy for the victim to escape. Keep lids tightly shut as they can be very quick and will jump when frightened. I keep some floating tubes of ag-pipe in the tank which they sometimes use for protection.</p> <p>Other species: will protect the immediate vicinity of their nest against even significantly larger species and seem to consider some Julidochromis as conspecifics but I've seen no other aggression.</p>
Food	<p>Not fussy at all, adults eat pretty much any flake or pellets up to 1mm. In the lake they pick over the biocover for sponges, invertebrates and algae.</p> <p>Fry take readily to baby brine shrimp (including freeze dried decapsulated bbs when I don't have fresh bbs available) and crushed flake. I usually feed using a large syringe to keep the tiny food particles in and around the rock surface rather than all through the tank.</p>
Breeding	In wide, shallow caves such as under rocks or slate. They don't like narrow caves where the female can't turn around and don't seem to like terracotta pots to breed in though they will use them to hide in.

Further reading and info

Google is your friend here.

You'll find a reasonable amount of info on the Chalinochromis genus and their (very) close cousins the Julidochromis.

I have photos and video sequences of mine posted up at

http://www.planetchan.com/laurie/pets/fish/albums/Chalinochromis_ndobhoi

References

Three of the photos above have been sourced from cichlid.com , sydneycichlid.com and aceforums.com.au as noted. I haven't requested permission from the copyright owners (yet) on the premise they would accept this as fair usage with simple attribution.

All other images used are my own.