

What Are They?

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Last fall, an aquarium was installed at my fitness club. I was glad to see an aquarium in such a public place. It is a 30 gallon tank with the usual gravel, rocks, and plastic plants. The fish included some Serpae Tetras, Gold Barbs, Algae Eaters, two gouramis, a Catfish and a couple of unfamiliar fish. What are they?

They reminded me of South or Central American Cichlids. Their eyes, fins and general body shape suggested a Severum, but the body seemed rather puffed out and the head too small. The mouth was pinched and did not open and close like that of a typical fish. One was an orange/pink/red shade and the other mostly yellow with some patches of green. The swimming motion reminded me of a fantail goldfish. Well some of you already know what these fish are, but I had to look them up. Sometimes they are called a red parrot cichlid, or blood red parrot cichlid, or simply parrot cichlid. They are not to be confused with the real parrot cichlid *Hoplarchus psittacus*. The real parrot cichlid is a large green fish from South America, but is generally not available to tropical fish hobbyists. See www.cichlidsoutheast.co.uk/Parrot_main.htm and www.cichlidae.com/gallery/Hoplarchus/psittacus.html

The blood red parrot cichlid is a man made hybrid that does not occur in nature. They appear to be a cross between the South American Severum and the Central American Midas (yellow) or Red Devil. There may be other combinations using the *Synspilum*. Most times these hybrids lay eggs but usually they do not hatch any fry.

Many people find their swimming technique to be endearing, and for a cichlid, they are certainly on the less aggressive side towards other tank mates. Some people comment that they have "personality". I would guess that these comments come from people who have not kept South American cichlids before. I can say that each of my five Severums have distinct personalities, to a point where my family and I have given them names. I personally am staying with the hundreds of naturally occurring varieties available in the hobby.

Recently, I saw a photo of a tank full of Jelly Bean Parrot fish. Each were solid red, purple, orange, yellow or green. Further investigation revealed some very nasty procedures to obtain these results. After some hybridization to get a yellow or white fish using a Gold Severum or Pink Convict, they are dipped in an acid to dissolve their slime coat. Then they are dipped in an unnatural colour dye, followed by a dip in an irritant to regenerate their slime coat. This procedure is sometimes done on various tetras, skunk botias, tinfoil barbs, tiger barbs, cory catfish and other albino specimens to get themed results or "fruit" varieties to widen their appeal for impulse buying. Get your Halloween or Easter tetras now! It seems that the only glass fish you can get have injected fluorescent dyes and are called "Painted" glass fish.

Is dyeing or "painting" such a bad thing? Many of these "painted" and dyed fish fall victim to various ailments within months, since their protective slime coat has been tampered with. The jelly bean parrots seem to have a higher survival rate, perhaps due to their cichlid background or larger size when compared to tetras. I am not sure how long the jelly bean colours will last before fading if at all. I personally am not going to get any to find out.

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