

## Tanganyika's Deep Dark Giants

By Phil Maznyk **KWAS** pmaznyk@rogers.com

*Cyphotilapia frontosa* is one of the largest and most peaceful of the cichlids collected from the Great Rift Lake, Lake Tanganyika.



Adult Male *Cyphotilapia* sp. *mpimbwe* — photo courtesy of **Matt Mannell**

They are also one of the most territorial of all Cichlids found in the Lake. Fronts as they are commonly called in the hobby are a large species often reaching 12 inches or slightly longer even in aquariums.



Juvenile sp. *ikola* — photo courtesy of **Phil Maznyk**

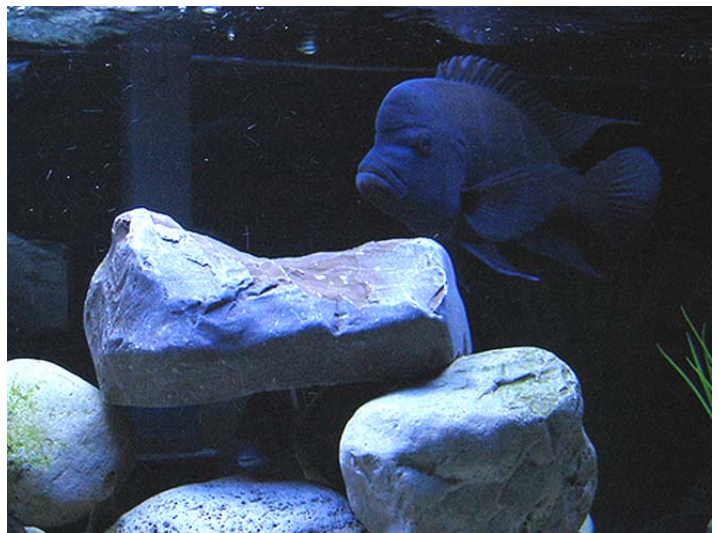
Females are somewhat smaller. The most common and striking features of these beautiful creatures are the large vertical bands running from their head to their tails. They number between 5 and 7 depending on the actual species. The large hump predominantly adorn-

ing their foreheads is the other feature most often talked about. Research indicates that the *Cyphotilapia frontosa* was likely first imported into North America in the early seventies. A quick search on the internet indicates that there are several variations of Frontosa all available to today's hobbyist.



Typical *Cyphotilapia frontosa* tank — photo courtesy of **Phil Maznyk**

Some of the more popular variants available include the Burundi, Kigoma, Mpimbwe and Zaire. The Burundi tends to have the largest of all frontal lobes which can be quite striking to look at.



Dark blue coloured adult male sp. *mpimbwe* — photo courtesy of **Phil Maznyk**

Other variants are often found quite deep in the Lake and can be a very deep blue with almost iridescent blue/purple/white banding. Adult males can be found with extremely long fins often trailing their body by a few inches. They are a magnificent, majestic fish to watch in the aquarium. I have personally kept variants

collected at Ikola and Mpimbwe. Both are a beautiful looking fish with the Mpimbwe variant being a darker more striking blue with very long fins. *Cyphotilapia frontosa* are found throughout the entire lake and are collected at many different stations surrounding this massive body of freshwater.



Alpha male *Cyphotilapia* sp. *mpimbwe* with juveniles—photo courtesy of **Phil Masnyk**

Typically they are found in sandy bottom areas mixed with large rock. Some Frontosa have been located at depths over 200 feet and collectors must be very careful when bringing these fish to the surface for fear of rupturing their swim bladder. This is one of the main factors that drive the price of this gorgeous fish to some lofty figures. This and their extreme popularity means many hobbyists will often pay upwards of \$100.00 each for some of the more in demand wild caught variants.

Lake Tanganyika's pH is quite high at around the 8 to 8.4 mark. Frontosa thrive in the high pH and alkalinity of the water. Heavy filtration and frequent water changes are a must. A common colony of Frontosa would be 2 males and 5 females. For a group of full grown adult fish a tank of no less than 135 gallons is required, with 180 gallons being preferred. The common Frontosa tank should have a sand bottom with plenty of large rock for caves.

Many Frontosa keepers will hide several large pieces of black PVC piping among the rock which gives the fish a place to hide and feel safe. This is a great way to keep

stress levels in a colony at a minimum. Many hobbyists will even add Vallisneria and Anubias to their tanks as Frontos are really not a rooting fish like many other rock dwelling cichlids. All variants of Frontosa enjoy eating a mixture of spirulina, peas and other green vegetables. Frozen Shrimp, Mysis and Krill should also be fed.



Female *Cyphotilapia frontosa* holding a mouthful of eggs above and protecting developing fry below — photos courtesy of **Matt Mannell**



Frontosa fry are quite large when their mothers finally release them. Sometimes mothers can be spotted juggling the large eggs in their bucal cavities. I've seen

them drop them and they look like white peas; they are that large! When finally released, the fry are spitting images of their parents. Fully developed fry are pretty much able to eat anything from ground up flake to brine shrimp. Within a few weeks they can already begin to eat adult brine shrimp. At a few months they will be able to eat pieces of garden worms and even larger night crawlers. Smaller pieces of thawed frozen shrimp can even be fed.

Frontosa being a carnivorous fish will also eat other smaller fish. If it even looks like it will fit into a Frontosa's mouth it is a potential target. Many advanced hobbyists will feed a special home made mixture of the above foods including adding some garlic to the mix. Today the hobbyist also has high quality pellet foods available which contain all of the ingredients needed to keep your prized fish healthy. I personally recommend if you feed your fish these pellets that you feed them the sinking variety.

Why sinking you ask? Frontosa have very large mouths and when the pellets float on top of the water many Frontos will inevitably gulp air as they eat. This air can become trapped in their stomachs and in some cases will cause 'Float'.



Stripe resting quietly in his favourite cave — photo courtesy of **Gerry Geddes**

This causes the fish great distress as they cannot submerge and can be found bobbing at the top of the tank until this trapped air is released. This can in some cases take a few weeks or even longer in extreme cases.

One common method to rid your fish of this trapped air is to let them swim into a submerged milk crate or similar container and then turn it upside down so they are unable to get out. The meshing allows them to get plenty of fresh oxygenated water and food while being kept submerged. This can decrease the time it takes to expel the trapped air in their stomach.



Stripe eating frozen shrimp from my hand — photo courtesy of **Gerry Geddes**

Frontosa can become quite attached to their keepers as we no doubt become attached to them. I kept a juvenile group of Mpimbwe Frontosa in a large 6 foot long tank. After several months I introduced a full grown wild caught male Mpimbwe to the tank. This magnificent specimen was given to me by my good friend, Matt Mannell.

“Stripe” as he was affectionately named was incredibly tame. He would consistently eat large pieces of shrimp out of my hand. Not only that, if you wanted to catch this fish there was no real effort required. Simply gently placing my hand under his belly he would hover perfectly still and let you place him into a bucket.

Currently *Cyphotilapia frontosa* are extremely popular in the hobby. Many hobbyists are successfully breeding some of the more popular variants. This has led to some superb first generation fish being available. If you would like to learn even more about the deep water giants from Lake Tanganyika, make sure you visit the most popular Frontosa forum on the internet at [www.cyphos.com](http://www.cyphos.com) 📍