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What A Mixture?

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Introduction

Earlier in the year(1995) I acquired four young, locally bred, Red Discus, wishing to try my hand at keeping this cichlid species once again. Occasionally. over the years. I have kept small specimens of Discus, from a variety of sources, but have lost every single one in a short period of time – why, I do not really know?

Some of the first specimens were brought back from Germany, being about two inches in length, by a very good friend who knew of a source of good quality stock. Whilst collecting my fish, I had a close look at his own stock, many of which were part of the same batch from which mine were from, they were in first class condition - no problems there thought I. Upon arriving home the young Discus were housed in a large tank and allowed to recover from their long journey.

The tank used to house the fish had been well prepared beforehand to ensure water quality, also chemistry, temperature and good filtration marched that as close as possible as the conditions from which they had been removed. I had had cichlids from the same source on a number of occasions with no problems at all - so envisaged the same on this occasion. Upon releasing the young Discus and checking their condition, I put the tank in total darkness, even switching off the main roof lights in the fish house, to allow them to settle down. Upon entering the fish house the next morning I found all of the fish were up and looking for food. Nothing seemed to be amiss. Within 24 hours the Discus had taken on a very dark coloration, had gone off their food and were skulking in the back corners of their tank. No other fish were present. A further 24 hours saw even further deterioration in the fish, some were starting to shed their body mucus, also being extremely nervous I split the group into two as a second tank had been prepared in case of problems. I had never witnessed this sort of thing before but applied medication that I thought may help. It did not and I lost every single fish within a week - yet my friend had not lost a single specimen.

Try Again

After the losses of my first ever Discus, I sought help, advice and suggestions from Discus keepers, some of who bred them on a regular basis, before venturing to obtain any more After the loss I had the water checked as far as was possible and there was nothing wrong with it. No disease was present as far as could be determined and other cichlids were installed into the same tanks shortly after, but with no ill effects. So I put it down to bad luck and experience.

Two years later I obtained yet more young Discus, from a variety of sources. taking great care to minimise any stress on them and ensuring the tank conditions were as perfect as possible. This time I prepared four tanks, some bare with no substrate or decoration of any kind. Two tanks contained a number of Neon Tetras as it was suggested that sheer nervousness could have been a contributory factor to the original losses. Everything went along very smoothly, the fish soon settled into their new homes and were eating everything I fed to them - no problems at all were witnessed

A week after initially installing the Discus, one small specimen turned very dark, lost its body mucus and died. Within the next two weeks every other fish followed suit and nothing I did seemed to even halt the progress of the losses. To say that I was upset would be putting things mildly; maybe I was not meant to succeed with Discus.

Final Attempt?

It had been some years since my disastrous experiences with trying to keep Discus and it was with some trepidation that I tried yet again. I had been offered four young specimens that were locally bred, by a friend who offered them in exchange for other cichlid species that I was breeding.

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Exchanging young of different species is one of the best ways of increasing your stock, variety of species and also the gene pool practised by a group of local fish keepers, not only cichlids. So I took up his offer to, collect the Discus at a later date.

I prepared a large tank, 72 x 24 x 12", which had a sandy substrate but no other decor, in which several species were kept over the next three months with no losses at all. The four Discus were collected, being four inches in length, and installed into the tank. A large piece of slate was stood upright against the back glass to act as a refuge. As they are kept in the fish house then my entering can cause a sudden noise, causing the fish to take fright. Lighting was subdued and only the roof lights were used.

The four fish displayed beautiful coloration, are all that was given to them and showed no untoward signs of anything being amiss. All went well for two weeks when the smallest of the four began occasionally dashing about the tank - here we go again thought I? None of the others seemed affected as I removed the small one to a quarantine and applied medication; it died two days later.

The three remaining Discus showed no signs of distress of any kind, but were very nervous on my approach to their tank, hiding behind the slate. I wondered if the addition of other fishes would offer a possible solution and a dozen, one inch, *Otocinclus* catfish were added. These, and small "Plecs", are used in my rearing tanks to clear up any uneaten foods. The Discus began to stay out in the open water more often, nibbling at their new companions if they got the chance

More Additions

Over the following weeks I slowly added more fishes to the Discus tank, starting with half a dozen young *Steanocranus casuarius*, of which two were killed in days. So small plant pots were added for these latest additions, along with spares for further planned additions. The Discus became even more bolder but were still skittish if sudden noise occurred.

I then added a dozen small specimens of *Neetroplus nematopus* from my breeding group; these were an inch in length. The Discus took a great interest in the new additions, chasing any that ventured behind their slate cave, but the extra plant pots stopped any serious harm befalling them. A few days later, watching the actions of the Discus, I wondered if slightly larger specimens of other cichlids would pose any kind of threat to them, six 2-3" Chocolate cichlids were added and nothing untoward occurred.

After a few weeks some of the *Neetroplus* began to pair up, the start at quite a small size, but I did not attempt to remove them as I feared I could upset the peace in the tank. They duly bred, only defending a very small area around their pot, but posed no threat to the Discus. Of course none of the resulting fry survived for very long. This situation still exists and they breed on a regular basis.

Finally

Other young cichlids have been added, including three *Neolamprologus tetracanthus* and also three specimens of "*Cichlasoma*" panamense, even a pair of Angels for a short time. These decided to breed on the filter overflow pipe and were duly removed to their own tank, where they have since refused to breed.

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The three remaining Discus are more adventurous, do not take flight, defend their slate cave with vigour, are eating and displaying well, so seem content and happy. I have not done anything out of the ordinary; some Discus keepers treat their fish like fine glassware, more or less just leaving them to their own devices. So why did this not happen with the previous specimens? Were they too small? Should they have had dither fish present from the outset? Did I treat them as too fragile? I do not know but I hope that I have learnt from these, possible, mistakes.

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