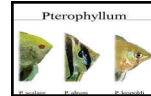




Altum "Orinoco" Angelfish (*Pterophyllum altum*)

Order: Perciformes - Family: Cichlidae



Type: Tropical

Also known as: the Altum Angelfish, Deep Angelfish, or Orinoco Angelfish.

Origin: It occurs strictly in the Orinoco River Basin and the Upper Rio Negro watershed in Southern Venezuela, Southeastern Colombia and extreme Northern Brazil. *Pterophyllum altum* is the national fish of Venezuela and an image of the fish appears on some currency bills of that country.

Overview: They are considered one of the most beautiful angels, but are more difficult to keep than the common angelfish, *Pterophyllum scalare*. They are also difficult to find in pet stores, as they are usually wild caught.

Description: *Pterophyllum altum*, the species most commonly referred to as angelfish or freshwater angelfish, is the most common species of *Pterophyllum* held in captivity.

Physical Characteristics: The species is the largest of the genus and specimens exceeding 50 cm in height (from tip of dorsal to tip of anal fin) have been reported in the wild; in aquariums, specimens are known to have grown to over 40 cm. Its natural base color is silver but with three brownish/red vertical stripes and red striations into the fins. The species may show red spotting and a bluish green dorsal overcast when mature and when aroused exhibits a black operculum spot. Characteristic of this species is an acute incision or notch above the nares (supraorbital indentation). All true Orinoco Altum specimens show this trait, whereas commercial hybrids product of crosses to *Pterophyllum scalare*, that are occasionally performed by breeders to sell them as "Orinoco Altum", may not exhibit the trait or it may appear in a lesser degree.

The true wild caught Orinoco Altum is among the most challenging among tropical fish to breed in captivity. Most Altum Angels are more frequently found in the well oxygenated, extremely soft waters of Upper and Middle Orinoco tributaries shed from the Guiana Shield Highlands, preferring a pH range between 4.5 to 5.8. These are very transparent backwaters with almost nil conductivity. Temperature range in these waters is between 78 and 84 °F (26 and 29 °C). They are also found in the Atabapo River and Inirida River floodplain, down the Casiquiare and Guainia floodplain where the Rio Negro is born, before entering Brazilian territory. Unlike *P. scalare* (mentioned above) which prefer to spawn on the submerged leaves of plants and trees in the flooded rainforest, *P. altum* prefers to spawn on submerged roots and tree branches in a moderate water current. This species is recommended for intermediate to advanced aquarists due to the detailed maintenance it requires for proper health.

Sexing / Sexual Dimorphism: *Pterophyllum altum* are hard to sex, when spawning they will pair off but it is not until the eggs are laid that the females become obvious.

Color Form: Its natural base color is silver but with three brownish/red vertical stripes and red striations into the fins.

Temperament: Compatibility (temperament to other fish species): Peaceful

Diet: Omnivore - Altums have a voracious appetite and will accept all flake and pellet foods. Twice a week they should be offered blood worms or brine shrimp. As they are mainly obtained in the wild, live foods will be preferred. They will eat live and frozen brine shrimp, granular fish food, and live and frozen blood worms.

Breeding: The true wild caught Orinoco Altum is among the most challenging among tropical fish to breed in captivity. *Pterophyllum altum* are very fussy fish to breed, unlike the other angel fish species, they require very soft and acidic water which is of the highest quality. They will lay their eggs on broad leaved plants or the tank glass. Once the eggs hatch, the parents will protect the fry until the next spawning. The fry should be fed on newly hatched brine shrimp until they reach a size where they can eat crushed flake. Most Altum Angels are more frequently found in the well oxygenated, extremely soft waters of Upper and Middle Orinoco tributaries shed from the Guiana Shield Highlands, preferring a pH range between 4.5 to 5.8. These are very transparent black waters with almost nil conductivity. Temperature range in these waters is between 78 and 84 °F (26 and 29 °C). Unlike *P. scalare* (mentioned above) which prefer to spawn on the submerged leaves of plants and trees in the flooded rainforest, *P. altum* prefers to spawn on submerged roots and tree branches in a moderate water current.

Life Span: Expected lifespan is 10 years, there are cases of *Pterophyllum altum* living considerably longer.

Disease: Altums can develop black spot disease, which produces small black spots over their body. It can be treated with Black Spot Control from Aquatronics. Avoid using copper sulfate for any Altum disease.

Max. Size: The Altum is much larger than the common angelfish and can reach 15 inches tall. Size of the fish in home aquariums (min-max): 10 - 15 cm (3.94" - 5.91")

Care Level: This species is recommended for intermediate to advanced aquarists due to the detailed maintenance it requires for proper health

Minimum Tank Size: The tank for Altums must be large and deep due to their size.

Water Conditions:

- Temp: 28-30 ° C
- pH: 4.5 to 5.8

Aquarium Setup: Large, long stemmed plants are recommended to enhance the Altums vertical appearance and to provide hiding places. The water should be very soft and peat filtration is recommended. Open swimming spaces should also be provided. Although Altums are peaceful, they can also be territorial. Some open swimming spaces should be provided. The substrate should be large, smooth gravel to ensure their mouths are not cut when gravel is picked up. Temperatures in the tank are best at the higher end of their range.

Compatibility: Altums are not a great community fish, but larger tetras may successfully be kept with them.

