



A. macmasteri (A120 - A121) (*Apistogramma macmasteri*)

Order: Perciformes - Family: Cichlidae - Subfamily: Geophaginae



Also known as:

Type: Freshwater

Description: *Apistogramma macmasteri* is a dwarf cichlid in the subfamily Geophaginae. It is a benthopelagic freshwater fish that lives in the Meta River and the Orinoco River in Colombia. They grow up to 7 centimetres (2.8 in) in total length.

Physical Characteristics: *Apistogramma macmasteri* (A120 - A121) is a robust dwarf cichlid that has been kept by aquarists for many years. They are in the macmasteri group of Apistogrammas (for more information on A numbers and Apistogramma groups see our section on Apistogramma).

Size / Weight / Age: **Max. Size:** *Apistogramma macmasteri* is a robust dwarf cichlid that and full grown males can reach nearly 4 inches in length. Females are correspondingly large and mature females can be larger than adult males of some Apisto species.

Color Form: Fish keepers have bred variants with brighter colors than those found in the wild. It is possible that some of these are interbred with *Apistogramma viejita*. Many aquarists associate *Apistogramma macmasteri* with the brightly colored fish that are sometimes available from specialty sources. These aquarium strains are the result of many generations of selective breeding to achieve the brilliant red colors, *A. macmasteri* but generally the wild strains are not as vividly colored.

Sexual dimorphism: Males are larger, more colourful and develop more extended fins than females.

Reproduction & Spawning: The female places her eggs inside the roof of a cavity or underneath a leaf. She takes care of the eggs and alone, while the male guards the territory. However, I have also seen lots of pairs with a very shaky relationship. In fact, on one occasion I had a male eliminate the female before the fry became free swimming. After the female was gone he took over the larval fry and became an excellent parent raising the fry until I separated them. He raised nearly 50 fry in that spawn and later proved to be an excellent pair-bonded father with a different female.

Lifespan:

Origin / Distribution: Known only from the Rio Guaytiquía and Rio Metica basins, upper Rio Meta system, Colombia. This is an aquarium strain of *A. macmasteri*. Individuals of some aquarium strains are amazingly colorful. *Apistogramma macmasteri* was described by Dr. Sven Kullander in 1979 from fish that were collected in the Colombian state of Meta. The species was named for Mark Macmaster - a well known dwarf cichlid enthusiast who brought attention to the species in the early 1970's. The species is found in the waters of the upper River Orinoco throughout northern Colombia and nearby Venezuelan areas. Additional field collections are needed to fully understand the range of the species. Records of the first imports of the species are lost but it was likely established in the hobby in the 1960's and has been available since then. Its likely that most *A. macmasteri* are actually sold to aquarists as *Apistogramma viejita*. This persistent mis-identification has been going on for years and shows no sign of vanishing. The fish that are widely available as *A. viejita* are usually aquarium strains of *A. macmasteri* or a related hybrid. There are some who believe it likely that *Apistogramma macmasteri* has been interbred with *Apistogramma viejita* to produce these very colorful fish. It seems that true *Viejita* are rarely (perhaps never) imported. Its not unusual for *Apistogramma macmasteri* to show up on the lists of importers and specialty fish dealers and aquarium forms are widely available as European imports and from domestic breeders. Wild *A. macmasteri* are often available from South American exporters on a seasonal basis. The wild fish are often juveniles and actual fish that arrive can be any of a number of Macmasteri type species that includes *A. sp. rotundus* and *A. alacrina* as well as *A. macmasteri*. Each of these other species are excellent dwarfs in their own right but be aware that if you order wild *A. macmasteri* you make actually receive a similar species.

Conservation Status:

Behavior:

Habitat / Biotope: The natural habitats of dwarf cichlids vary widely and many aquarists try to duplicate natural habitats in their tanks. This is a great practice and I have had great success when trying to reproduce natural habitats. Most dwarfs are highly adaptable and will thrive in many different types of environments as long as they are complex environments. They must have a lot of nooks, crannies and places to hide and spread out in. Complex habitats can be developed in the aquarium in a number of different ways.

Diet: Most dwarf cichlids are omnivores and consume a variety of foods in nature. In the aquarium they will eat many different foods and a diet that provides them a variety of healthful foods is fairly easy to provide. Many dwarfs have a reputation of needing live food for survival. The truth is that almost every fish will learn to eat the foods that are available. However, live food is always relished and the frequent feeding of live food helps to insure success. Wild fish are often more demanding of live food that tank raised. However, many dwarf cichlid breeders exclusively feed live foods and the fish they produce are often slow to convert to prepared foods. These fish will generally convert to high quality frozen food if they go a period of time without receiving live. Once they are accustomed to feeding on frozen food the conversion to prepared is usually a matter of patience. It is important that your fish receive an adequate supply of food that has good nutritional value. In most situations your fish will thrive on two feedings a day, morning and evening. Initially it may be hard to determine the right amount of food to feed and you should err on the side of too little until you know your fish and their consumption. Do not think that you must feed your fish on a precise schedule. In nature they tend to go through periods of plentiful food when feeding is easy, and periods of scarce food when they might go weeks without feeding. In fact, mature fish that are slow to breed can often be triggered by a fasting period of one to two weeks followed by massive water changes and good food.

Aquarium Setup: Both wild and aquarium bred *Apistogramma macmasteri* make excellent aquarium residents provided you satisfy their needs. Provided adequate cover and structure is available this species? is unfussy with regards to décor with ceramic flowerpots, lengths of plastic piping and other artificial materials all useful additions. A more natural-looking arrangement might consist of a soft, sandy? substrate? with wood roots and branches placed such a way that plenty of shady spots and caves are formed. The addition of dried leaf litter (beech, oak or Kelapang almond leaves are all suitable) would further emphasise the natural feel and with it bring the growth of beneficial microbe colonies as? decomposition? occurs. These can provide a valuable secondary food source for? fry, whilst most populations will appreciate the tannins and other chemicals released by the decaying leaves. Leaves can be left in the? tank? to break down fully or removed and replaced every few weeks. If maintaining a? blackwater? population? a net bag filled with? aquarium-safe? peat? can also be added to the? filter? or suspended over the edge of the? tank. Fairly dim lighting is recommended and plant? species? from? genera? such as? Microsorium.? Taxiphyllum.? Cryptocoryne? And Anubias? are best since they will grow under such conditions. A few patches of floating vegetation to diffuse the light even further may also prove effective. Filtration, or at least water flow, should not be very strong and very large water changes are best avoided with 10-15% weekly adequate provided the? tank? is lightly-stocked.

Minimum Tank Size: Small 5 to 10 gallon

Care Level: They are generally easy to feed and are relatively undemanding.

Water Conditions: Dwarf cichlids have an established reputation for demanding extreme water conditions. While some species may require very soft acid water, most in water that is moderately soft and only slightly acid, or even neutral. These conditions can be found in some areas in the tap water but most of us are not so lucky. Use reverse osmosis (most commonly referred to as RO) water in all tanks. RO filters have become quite common and the bottled water dispensed in most grocery store machines is RO filtered. RO water is very pure and of the highest quality. It should contain virtually no hardness and be of neutral pH. While it is certainly possible to fill your tank(s) with water purchased from the store, this is not a viable long term situation for most hobbyists. It is possible to keep and possibly breed many species of dwarf cichlids in hard alkaline water. However, there are few that will thrive in these conditions. Most commonly the fish will not grow as well or as colorful as those raised in softer water. Many hard water spawnings fail because the eggs do not become fertilized in hard water. These infertile eggs are quickly eaten by the parent. Attempts at artificial hatching will result in fungused eggs.

Swimming Level: Bottom

Compatibility / Temperament: They can be aggressive so lots of cover is recommended. I have seen *A. macmasteri* form very strong pair bonds that last through multiple spawnings.

