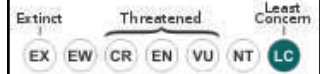




Nijssen's Dwarf Cichlid (*Apistogramma nijsseni*)

Order: Perciformes - Family: Cichlidae - Subfamily: Geophaginae



Also known as: This species is assigned the code A180 under the DATZ system and has been available under a handful of trade names including 'panda dwarf cichlid' and 'Nijssen's dwarf cichlid'.

Type: Tropical/ Brackish Water

Origin / Geographical Distribution: Restricted to the Quebrada Carahuayte, a left bank tributary of the Ucayali River in Peru. It is known only from small streams (quebraditas) along the road from Jenaro Herrera towards Colonia Angamos, starting at the km 13 mark and extending to the Quebrada Carahuayte.

Description: *Apistogramma nijsseni* is a species of cichlid fish, endemic to the black water habitats in the Carahuayte river drainage, Peru. It reaches a maximum length of 8 cm (3 in). The species is popular aquarium fish amongst dwarf cichlid hobbyists.

Physical Characteristics: *Apistogramma nijsseni* is a moderately deep-bodied species with pronounced sexual dichromatism. Both sexes have short dorsal-fin lappets and clearly rounded caudal fin. There is no evidence of a lateral band at any size, but roundish lateral and caudal spots are well evident. In females the suborbital stripe, lateral spot, and caudal spot are greatly expanded; the suborbital stripe may cover all of the cheek and gill-cover. Cephalic lateralis pores as in *A. cacatuoides*, with 3 infraorbital and 5 dentary pores. Anteroventral half of cheek naked. Simple (anteriorly) and bicuspid (posteriorly) lower pharyngeal teeth.

Size / Weight / Age: Males reach 39.2 mm, and females 30.7 mm SL in the wild. Males may reach 52 mm SL in aquaria, however.

Color Form: Living males are blue on the sides. Lateral and caudal spots show only faintly. Dorsal and caudal fins have bright red margins. Living females are yellowish with deep black suborbital stripe, lateral spot and caudal spot.

Sexual dimorphism: *Apistogramma nijsseni*, generalized color pattern of females in the type series. Note large dark blotches, not present in the male.

Lifespan: The expected life span of Viejita is 2-3 years.

Behavior: Captive-raised fish are the recommended choice for the community aquarium. Wild examples are best maintained alone or with small 'dither' fishes such as *Nannostomus* spp., and ideally should not be mixed with other *Apistogramma*.

Habitat: The natural habitats were described and discussed at length by de Rham & Kullander (1983). The species occurs in small, shaded streams with clear, tea-brown water. Associated species occasionally included the congeneric species *A. agassizii* or *A. eunotus*. Inhabits slow-moving black water streams, creeks and tributaries, as well as smaller rivers. The water there is typically stained dark brown with humic acids and other chemicals released by decaying organic material. This results in a negligible dissolved mineral content, and the pH can drop as low as 4.0 or 5.0. The dense rainforest canopy above means that very little light penetrates the water surface, and the substrates normally littered with fallen tree branches and a deep layer of rotting leaves.

Diet: Primarily carnivorous and apparently feeds mostly on benthic invertebrates in nature. In the aquarium live and frozen foods such as *Artemia*, *Daphnia* and chironomid larvae (bloodworm) should be offered regularly although most specimens will also learn to accept dried alternatives with pelleted products generally preferred to flake.

Breeding: Substrate spawner which normally lays its eggs in crevices or cavities among the décor. The female is responsible for post-spawning care of eggs and fry and in smaller aquaria the male may need to be removed as she may become hyper-aggressive.

Aquarium Setup: Base dimensions of 60 * 30 cm or more are acceptable for a single pair with a group requiring larger quarters.

Minimum Tank Size: 20 gal (76 L)

Care Level: 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 Ketapang 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 black water 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.

Water Conditions: Oxygen readings gave O2 saturation 39% (after rain) in one site, 79.5% in another site.

- **Temperature:** 24.5-27.5 °C
- **pH:** 5.0-5.6.
- **Hardness:** h less than 1 °dGH
- **Conductivity:** 3-14 µS

Swimming Level: Preferred swimming area: Bottom levels

Compatibility / Temperament: Basically peaceful, but can be Mildly Aggressive is best kept with other small species.

