



Pink Convict Cichlid (*Amatitlania nigrofasciata*) Variety

Order: Perciformes - Family: Cichlidae - Subfamily: Cichlasomatinae



Type: Tropical, Central American Cichlid

Also known as: Zebra Cichlid

Origin: The type species, *A. nigrofasciata*, which used to cover all these species, is restricted to the northern population ranging from El Salvador to Guatemala on the Pacific coast and from Honduras to Guatemala on the Atlantic coast.

Overview: Convict cichlids are endemic to the lakes and streams of Central America. In particular, the species occurs along the eastern coast of Central America from Guatemala to Costa Rica, and on the western coast from Honduras to Panama. Convict cichlids prefer moving water, and are most frequently found in habitats with cover in the form of rocks or sunken branches. Convict cichlids are relatively tolerant of cool water, an ability which has allowed the species to colonize volcanic lakes at elevations of 1,500 meters (4,900 ft). At four natural habitats of the convict cichlid in Costa Rica.

Description: The Pink Convict Cichlid (*Amatitlania nigrofasciata*) is a pseudo-albino of the *Archocentrus nigrofasciatus* Convict Cichlid. Sometimes called Zebra Cichlid or Convict Cichlid, this fish is monotone in color, with the female having an orange patch on her stomach. The male is larger, monotone, has a steeper forehead and longer fins. As it ages, the male will acquire a fatty lump on the forehead. A striking addition to any aquarium, they are not recommended for the community tank due to their aggressive tendencies.

Physical Characteristics: The wild-type of the species has 8-9 black vertical bars on a blue-grey body, along with a dark blotch on the operculum. Juvenile convict cichlids are monomorphic until they reach sexual maturity. Unusually for fish, the female is more highly colored. The male is mostly gray with light black stripes along the body. Males are larger than females, and they have more pointed ventral, dorsal and anal fins which often extend into filaments. In addition, older males frequently develop vestigial fatty lumps on their foreheads. She has more intense black bands across the body, and pink to orange coloration in the ventral region and on the dorsal fin. Selective breeding has resulted in a leucistic strain of convict cichlids, in which the dark barring of the wild type is absent. These are also known as white convicts, pink convicts, gold convicts and *A. nigrofasciata* "Congo". The leucistic coloration is caused by a mutation in an autosomal gene and is recessively inherited.

Sexing / Sexual Dimorphism: The average standard length of mature males in the wild ranged from 6.3-6.6 centimeters, while breeding-sized females ranged from 4.2-5.5 centimeters. You can tell if it's a female because they have bright orange coloring on their sides, males don't have bright coloring, but they do have longer, bigger fins.

Color Form: The convict cichlid displays significant color variation across its range.

Temperament:

Diet: The Pink Convict Cichlid is omnivorous and will eat most prepared and frozen foods, including freeze-dried bloodworms, Tubifex, and ocean plankton, as well as flake food and Cichlid pellets. In natural habitats, the species feeds on crustaceans, small fish, insects, various worms, plants and algae. Social status and associated stress can affect digestive function in convict cichlids

Breeding: The Pink Convict Cichlid is a cave-breeder and will accept a range of water conditions. To promote breeding increase the water temperature to between 75-79°F. Some females will spawn between a cave and an open area. The Pink Convict Cichlid readily pairs and forms a patriarch/matriarch family and both the male and female will care for the young. The fry will respond to signals from both the male and the female. The species can reach sexual maturity at as young as 16 weeks, though sexual maturity more commonly occurs at 6 months. Sexually mature convicts form monogamous pairs and spawn in caves or crevices. In the wild, the fish excavate caves by moving earth from underneath large stones. Females lay the eggs on the upper or side surfaces of the cave to which they adhere. Like most cichlids, convicts brood (exhibit parental care of) both eggs and free-swimming fry. After fertilization the eggs hatch after approximately 72 hours. During that time, the parents expel intruders and potential egg predators from around the nest. They also fan the eggs, moving water with their fins over the clutch to bring oxygen to the eggs. They fan the eggs both day and night, using their sense of smell to recognize the presence of the eggs in the dark, and keeping their pelvic fins in contact with the eggs to remain at the right distance for fanning. The parents also recognize each other via their sense of smell, and sniff out and react to the presence of potential predators. After hatching, a further 72 hours is required for the larvae to absorb their yolk sacs and develop their fins prior to becoming free-swimming fry. While in this free swimming stage, fry forage during daylight in a dense school and return to the cave or crevice for the night. Like other cichlids, the parents also retrieve their young just before dark, sucking up three or four fry at a time into their mouth, swimming back to the nest, and spitting the young into it. The parents do this in anticipation of night arrival, using an internal time sense to know that night is approaching, as shown by laboratory experiments in which convict cichlids continued to retrieve even before nights that were not preceded by any signal such as dim light. During the night, the fry bunch up at the bottom of the cave or nest, where the parents fan them. Both parents remain involved in guarding the fry from brood predators and engage in behaviors to assist feeding such as moving leaves or fin digging. Brood care of eggs, larvae and free-swimming juveniles in the wild can last 4-6 weeks, and occurs only once per season for the majority of females. In contrast, females in aquariums are known to breed many times per year with short intervals of 12-13 days between broods, as long as suitable rocks or similar surfaces are available for them to lay their eggs on. In captivity, breeding pairs of convict cichlids have been demonstrated to adopt similarly aged fry from other parents. In other cichlids it has been suggested this behavior may reduce predation on the fry belonging to the adoptive parents, through a dilution effect

Life Span: Around 7-10 years.

Max. Size: The maximum standard length has been reported to be 10 centimeters, with total length near 12 centimeters (4.7 in). Body weight has been reported to range from 34-36 grams (1.2-1.3 oz).

Care Level: Easy

Minimum Tank Size: The Pink Convict Cichlid requires a minimum tank of 30 gallons with a gravel bottom, rocks and plenty of hiding places among the rocks or some inverted pots. Floating plants are recommended as a form of cover. Because of their aggressive nature, Pink Convict Cichlids should only be housed with other more aggressive fish of the same size or larger.

Water Conditions: The pH was found to range from 6.6-7.8, while alkalinity ranged from 63 to 77 ppm CaCO₃. The daily water temperature ranged from 26-29 °C (79-84 °F).

Aquarium Setup: Convict cichlids are easily maintained and bred in aquaria. Decorate the aquarium to mimic the natural environment and include rocks and artificial caves for breeding. The species is an unfussy omnivore and most types of prepared fish foods are readily accepted. The species also consumes aquatic plants. Brood care is reduced in aquarium strains. Due to the species' tendency to dig, external filtration is superior to Undergravel filter systems. Its relatively small size, along with ease of keeping and breeding, make the convict an ideal cichlid for beginners and advanced aquarists alike interested in observing pair bonds and brood care.

Compatibility: Convict cichlids are aggressively territorial during breeding and pairs are best kept alone.

