

SPAWNING THORICTHYS MEEKI—THE FIREMOUTH CICHLID

Sam Borstein, Age 13

My Dad, Rick Borstein, obtained 8 *Thorictus meeki*—more commonly known as the Firemouth Cichlid—from fellow GCCA member Ric Perez around the beginning of March in 2003. They were about 1-1/2 inches long. They were first kept in a 90-gallon tank with an overflow wet/dry system. This, though, was a problem. Since the overflow was uncovered, seven of the eight fish went into the overflow. I rescued two of them, but the other five died. We covered the overflow with egg-crate material, which solved the problem. The fish grew to about 2-1/2 inches. Then, my Dad put a group of *Placidochromis phenochilus* and a breeding pair of *Neolamprologus cylindricus* in the tank. Sure enough, the *cylindricus* bred and beat the crap out of every other fish in the tank. After the *phenochilus* and *cylindricus* fry were gone, we left the Firemouths in with the *cylindricus*, but they did not breed.

Since they were all small and did not have that much red coloration, we thought that we had all female Firemouths. We picked up a 5-inch male Firemouth from Piotr Ziolkowski at the February GCCA meeting. We put him in the tank and he immediately fought with the *cylindricus* until seeing, and being attracted to, the three remaining females. This "prize fight" picture would eventually become the cover of the March 2004 Cichlid Chatter. The Firemouth lost the fight and was extremely beaten up. I offered to take the fish and put him in my new 55-gallon tank with a group of *Labidochromis caeruleus*.

The next week, we moved the three other Firemouths (females?) from the 90-gallon tank into my 35-gallon tank. It was around March when we first noticed breeding behavior. My smallest Firemouth at two inches got a fire engine red throat and slowly, but surely, massacred almost every *Yellow Labidochromis*. Eventually, one remaining yellow lab and the other two Firemouths hovered in a corner. The next week, the

dominant female and the male we got from Piotr paired off. They laid around 200 eggs—not bad for a first spawn. The eggs hatched fine and I had wrigglers, but I had a problem. I was going on vacation that week. The fry would be free swimming in about 2-3 days and I would be gone all week. I would usually feed live baby brine shrimp to the fry during their first days, so I decided to put Cyclop-eze in an automatic feeder. The fry would get fed once a day while I was gone.

When I came back, I found out that the automatic feeder had worked pretty well. I had around fifty fry alive and, of course, my last yellow Lab was a floater. I figured that the books were right and that Firemouths were really great parents. Wrong! That night, the first thing I did was feed baby brine shrimp to the fry. The next day, there were only around 25 fry. I was OK with that because that was more than enough for BAP. But, why would I lose half of them after feeding baby brine shrimp which is generally much better for baby fish than Cyclops-eeze? I kept on feeding brine shrimp. The next day I had fifteen fry. Then, the next day, only ten. I thought that the fry had been picked on by the other two Firemouths, so I took them out and gave them back to my Dad who still hadn't BAP'd them.

That next day, we had family over for dinner. In the middle of dinner, my Dad told me to set up the brine shrimp hatchery because he had forgotten. He then told me to check on the Firemouth fry because he saw the male eat three babies! The stupid fish was cannibalizing its fry. I set up the brine shrimp hatchery and then checked on the babies. There were only six. That was cutting it a little close! I then called for the "emergency water change". I drained the tank and had my Dad help me net out the remaining six half-inch long fry. They were then placed in a ten gallon tank by themselves. I gave the pair back to my Dad. I felt a lot better knowing I had a BAP of the six fish remaining. I BAP'd the Firemouths at the June 2004 GCCA meeting.

The Firemouths later bred for my Dad. Not wanting to deal with the same problems I had, he took the parents out five days after the fry were free swimming. In typical fashion, they were passed on to another GCCA member—Mike Helford.

From this experience, I no longer believe that all Central American cichlids are smart! To this day, I have to say that the male Firemouth I had was the dumbest fish I have kept. Oh well, I still got the BAP and that is all that matters! ☺☺

All Species Auction Tropical Fish Swap

16 January 2005
Set-Up Starts @ 9:30am
Auction Starts @ 11:00am

At Sheraton Hotel, Arlington
Heights, IL

27 February 2005
Set-Up Starts @ 9:00am
Meet Starts @ 10:00am

At Sheraton Hotel, Arlington
Heights, IL