



Breeding Rams -

The Blue Ram has been known under several scientific names such as "Apistogramma" and "Papiliochromis ramirezi". Either way, this dwarf cichlid has remained a popular individual since its discovery in approx. 1948. A native to South America's Amazon region, namely Columbia and Western Venezuela, it enjoys the soft, slightly acidic waters of that area. Though this species can be kept in moderately hard water, it would show more colour and of cause be more inclined to breed in softer water (less than 10degKH, or 180ppm). This species also prefers the slightly cooler water of between 22°C and 26°C. But in proof of how robust this fish is, I have bred them successfully in temperatures up to 34°C. Even though this is a small fish by comparison, it does not however, take joy out of being squeezed into a small aquarium or crowded among hundreds of other fish.

This is a small fish that likes the great outdoors so to speak. To keep these fish happy, a moderate to large aquarium with bunches of bushy plants, while allowing for the odd clearing for swimming room, and slow, even water movement should suffice. Under these circumstances, these fish will happily breed when ever they feel like it... unless certain parameters are not considered!

These include:

- Good water quality
- Healthy variety of diet
- Considerable choice of tank mates
- Plenty of the right food on the side for the babies

Very well aged water or the best brands of conditioners added to the water is almost always a must (with specific attention paid to your type/quality of water supply). Rams are very sensitive to toxins especially large quantities of dissolved organic waste. Small but regular water changes are necessary to maintain the optimum water quality for these sensitive fish. The fish to be pampered the most when it comes to water changes are always the rams.

Vary the diet as much as possible. The main feed is based on frozen food such as a fresh mixture of bloodworm, chicken liver, finely grated carrots and peas and other additives. Sinking pellets are given as a snack between their two meals daily. And as a boost for their libido, grindal worms once a week. Here's a perfect partner for the slow witted and picky discus. They both thrive on the same type of diet, living space, water quality and best of all, the same type of tank mates. If you wouldn't put it in a discus tank, don't put it in with rams, it's that simple.

Rams will lay their eggs almost anywhere, on plants, wood, rock, glass and even the gravel. Best of all: a small flat rock hidden among plants. The up to 200 eggs will hatch in 3 days and the fry will free swim in a further 4 days. For the first two days of their free swimming life, they struggle to eat the relatively large newly hatched brine shrimp. Infrusoria for the first two days followed by newly hatched brine shrimp is recommended. Losses should be expected if brine shrimp is only offered.

Baby rams are slow growers and picky eaters. Wean them slowly onto dry foods and frozen foods with the addition of live foods such as daphnia and small mozzie wrigglers. Females are capable of spawning at 3 months but males are only fully fertile at over 4 months. They are a short lived fish of up to 4 years, so breed them early to ensure successful generations.