

My Experience with Red Devils

About ten years ago during a family vacation to Michigan, we stopped in Chicago for a few days of sight-seeing. Since I was the only one interested in fishy things, I went to the Shedd Aquarium while the rest of the family visited the Museum of Natural History (whatever it is called, just a bunch of dead stuff over there).

Being on my own allowed for a quick walk through the aquarium, but the thing that really caught my eye was a Red Devil (*Amphilophus labiatus*) surrounded by a cloud of fry – a really beautiful sight. I'm sure we are all in the aquarium hobby for various reasons, but this is one of mine – I love seeing parents with fry, and the bigger the cloud of fry the better. I decided then and there that I wanted to experience this Red Devil sight in one of my tanks.

Since I tend to focus on fish I can sell, I discussed the Red Devil with a local fish shop owner when I saw a large pair of Red Devils in one of his tanks. He assured me they spawned frequently, but he didn't keep any fry because the Red Devils were difficult to sell. Unfortunately, that seems to be true of many fish that spawn in large numbers. It is especially true of Red Devils because they are mean, mean, mean, and pretty ugly as juveniles. In fact, they take a good while to change from a brown/gray fish to the pretty red, orange, and white colors you see on the adults. The change is also gradual, over many months.

I finally got my opportunity with Red Devils when I got them cheap at a TCA auction. I had bid on them a few times over the years, but given that I had tabbed them as a poor income producing fish, I didn't bid too high. I got 6 fish for about \$3. They certainly didn't look like Red Devils, but I trusted the seller knew what they were.

Over a period of months they grew. Eventually, they began getting some white in with the brown, and then some light orange started appearing. One grew larger than the rest, so I kept an eye out to make sure he didn't start killing off the others. One day I found one dead, and noticed the big guy had everyone, except the smallest, pinned against the back wall of the tank. Then I noticed the little one was guarding a small rock which was covered with eggs.

I removed everyone but the parents, and just watched the parents for a couple of days. With egg layers, I generally let them keep their first spawn to see what they will do with them. Since I wasn't in these fish for

the money, my only goal was to see the cloud of fry and pick up some Breeder Award points. So, I had less incentive to remove the eggs anyway.

I came home two days later, and checked the pair. I now had no eggs, no fry, and one dead female in the tank. Chalk up bad experience number one with the Red Devils. I was pretty sure I had another female or two (probably three) so I wasn't too devastated.



Red Devil Male with Fry (photo by author)

I decided they needed more space, so I moved the Red Devils to a 125 gallon tank (they had been in half of a 70 gallon breeding tank. The big guy was about 3 ½ inches, and the others an inch or so less, so they hadn't outgrown the breeding tank, but I figured the females needed more space.

I had some large Burundi Frontosas in the 125, and a large deformed Red Bahia. (I generally keep deformed fish if they are too large for the others to eat) Putting the Red Devil in with the frontosa was a bad idea. I don't have a lid on the tank, and frontosa jump. I lost two large males within a few weeks. I could have moved them, but I'm fairly lazy with fish that aren't producing. Still, they were money fish, and I wasn't very happy

with myself. Regardless, it was too late to do anything about it. It wasn't long before the Red Bahia and two of the Red Devils decided life on the outside was better than life with the big male Red Devil, who was up to about 6 inches. I don't know why fish insist on jumping BEHIND a big tank when they jump out, but it always seems they do.

Soon after everyone exited the tank, I found the female guarding eggs. A day later, the eggs were gone, the female was hiding under a rock, and the male had the run of the tank.

A few weeks later, I found the male surrounded by a cloud of fry. Finally, the sight I had longed for. It was well worth the wait, though probably not worth the loss of the two big Frontosa. I took some of the fry (had to get at least six for breeder award points). I took probably 50-75. A few days later, all the fry I left in the tank were gone.

For several weeks, each day was the same in the tank, the male going where he pleased, and the female hiding under a rock on her side (I don't know how she does that – no choice I guess). The female would dart out at dinner time and get chased back to her hiding place. One day, I came home, and the female was out with the male, getting along very well. They were both guarding a spawn of eggs. Each day I came home, both fish were out, but they were always guarding another area. I couldn't see what they were guarding, but I assumed the eggs had hatched and had been moved. After a few days I was again awarded with the sight of a cloud of fry hovering around one of the parents. The female was allowed to stay out of hiding. Days went by, the female was still out, and the babies were all still there. The babies grew. I kept expecting them to disappear, but they didn't. After three weeks, mom resumed her position under the rock and the male guards the fry. I don't know if he is guarding them, or just tolerating them, but they are all still there. If they were a money fish that would be a good thing. As it is now, they just eat.

I have been richly rewarded watching the Red Devils. A man came by a few weeks ago to buy some fish, and he had nothing good to say about the Red Devil. "Meanest fish he ever had – took it back to the store and got his money back – wouldn't ever have a Red Devil again." After watching the parents with the fry, he asked how much I wanted for some fry.

In a final note, I will address aggressiveness of this fish. It leaps at your fingers if you put them over the tank. Even just turning on lights. I don't know if it wants food, or wants you out of the way, but it strikes anything close. While talking to someone earlier today, I made the mistake of

resting my arm on the side of the tank, and that stupid fish jumped out and took a bit out of the arm – drew blood, and left a nice mouth print on my elbow. Anybody want a pretty Red Devil - **cheap?**



Red Devil Bite (photo by author)