

Aequidens pulcher (Green Coscarob or Blue Acara)

Family: Cichlidae (Cichlids and Tilapias)

Order: Perciformes (Perch and Allied Fish)

Class: Actinopterygii (Ray-finned Fish)



Fig. 1. Green coscarob, *Aequidens pulcher*.

[http://www.zoofirma.ru/images/stories/aqa/fish/aequidens_pulcher/aequidens_pulcher_13.jpg,
downloaded 1 April 2015]

TRAITS. *Aequidens pulcher* are lovely sights. They grow up to about 20cm in length (Kullander, 2003), and have a unique bright blue/grey colouration mixed throughout their body. They are decorated with about 8 vertical black stripes on their body, anal and dorsal fins with an orange/yellow colour on the tips and white iridescent spots to complement their look (Fig. 1). The male and female fish are very similar, but the male's anal and dorsal fins are longer, more pointed and arched, whereas the female's are a little more rounded (Kullander, 1983).

DISTRIBUTION. Found in Central and South America; Trinidad and Tobago, Venezuela and Colombia. They inhabit both clear and turbid flowing streams (Kullander, 2003).

HABITAT AND ACTIVITY. Found in habitats of clear flowing streams, to turbid still waters. They are somewhat aggressive and extremely territorial in their areas. They live near rocks and vegetation (Brough, 2008).

FOOD AND FEEDING. They are carnivores with a set of well developed pharyngeal teeth in their throat along with their regular teeth. They feed on earthworms, crustaceans and insects. Also if they are around fish smaller than themselves, they would eat them as well.

POPULATION ECOLOGY. These fish are monogamous, semi-aggressive and extremely territorial when breeding (Courtenay et al., 1974; Kullander, 2003). The lifespan is up to 10 years (Kullander, 1983). This species was introduced in Florida (USA) and was considered very common, but is now extirpated there (Courtenay et al., 1974).

REPRODUCTION. Most of these fish breed at about 10cm long. They are egg layers and the female lays about 100-500 eggs on a clean surface (rock or broad leaf). They breed several times a year. When the female is finished laying her eggs, the male then fertilizes them (Brough, 2008). The pair are extremely aggressive when at their breeding site and take turns guarding the eggs while the other feeds (Fig. 1). The eggs take about 42-72 hours to hatch (Kullander, 1983). The fry are fast growing and easy to raise. Parents move fry in their mouth to different locations (Kullander, 2003).

BEHAVIOUR. These fish are monogamous; they pair off and are very territorial when spawning. They often bully fishes smaller than they are. Also, they have spiny rays on their pectoral, pelvic, dorsal and anal fins which discourage predators (Brough, 2008). After hatching, the fry remain on the surface of the leaf or rock where the female laid her eggs, moving their tails. The parents move the fry by mouth to another location (Kullander, 2003).

APPLIED ECOLOGY. The green coscarob is not listed on the IUCN (Brough, 2008). These fish are often bred in captivity. Because of this, they are not expensive and are often kept as pets in aquariums. They are easy to maintain and feed once their water is kept clean since these fish are sensitive to pollutants and pH instability (Courtenay et al., 1974).

REFERENCES

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