



Fact Sheet

Pearl Cichlids (*Geophagus brasiliensis*)



Juvenile Pearl cichlid

Pearl Cichlids are a popular aquarium fish. They do not belong in our local waterways, but feral populations have been found in the Swan catchment. These invasive fish threaten native fish populations and degrade our streams and rivers.

Description

The overall background of both males and females is a greyish-green. Colours change with moods and during mating sessions. The Pearl cichlid has one dark spot which may or may not be visible on its body, located towards its tail. It may also display several black bands running top to bottom down its body. It has bright blue speckles across its body, which shine bright in a healthy fish. They have red fins which may have blueish tones and be tipped in black, but again these colours may change, brighten or fade depending on the mood¹. Pearl cichlids are a moderate to large fish (especially when compared to our native freshwater fish species), reaching a maximum reported length of 280mm. Most fish observed locally are less than 100mm long.

Range

Pearl Cichlids are native to coastal rivers of southern Brazil and Uruguay, South America. In Western Australia, established feral populations are known to occur in the Altone Park Wetlands (Beechboro) and in many of the lakes along the eastern perimeter of The Vines, near Ellenbrook.

Habitat

Pearl cichlids are considered neotropical freshwater fish² and in their natural environment they favour rivers and streams with temperatures between 22 and 28°C. However local feral populations occur in both lakes and streams and survive in conditions ranging from 13.8 to



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29.3°C. Studies have shown that this species can survive indefinitely in salinities as high as 36 parts per thousand (equivalent to seawater).

Biology

These fish mature in their first year³. At this time they also tend to become quite aggressive towards other fish. In Western Australia, they spawn from late spring through to June³, with successful pairings reported to result in 150-200 offspring¹. They feed predominantly on vegetation and detritus however terrestrial insects and native gilgies become significant dietary components when the fish reach a larger size³.

Conservation

Pearl cichlids have no conservation value in Australia as they are an introduced species. They are permitted in aquaria only.

Management messages

The introduction of non-native species, such as Pearl cichlids, threatens conservation values in the Swan Canning Riverpark. Invasive species are now identified as the greatest threat to Australia's biodiversity after habitat loss. The threat comes not only from direct pressure on native species and the environment, but also from indirect pressure from microbes and diseases carried by the exotic introduced fish.

Pearl cichlids are also known as Pearl eartheaters and they eat by sifting through the bottom sediments, resulting in disturbance that can: negatively impact small animals living in the sediment; destroy aquatic vegetation; and mobilise nutrients and contaminants from the sediment into the water column.

Pearl cichlids have the potential to spread widely in the Riverpark. You can help to prevent the spread of this and other feral fish species by:

1. never releasing introduced species into our rivers, waterways or dams. Unwanted fish can be rehoused. Rehousing services are provided by groups such as the Perth Cichlid Society (www.perthcichlid.com.au/forum/index.php?showtopic=23162)
2. reporting the presence of freshwater pest species such as the Pearl cichlid to the Department of Fisheries using the FISHWATCH service on 1800 815 507. This helps track infestation and control the problem.

For information on efforts to control Pearl cichlids please refer to the Swan River Trust's webpage (www.swanrivertrust.wa.gov.au) on *Managing Feral Fish*.

References

1. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pearl_cichlid
2. www.fishbase.org
3. Beatty, S. Morgan, D., Sarre, G., Cottingham, A., Buckland A. (2010) Assessment of the distribution and population viability of the Pearl cichlid in the Swan River Catchment, Western Australia. Report for the Swan River Trust.