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Strings and Sealing Wax and Other Fancy Stuff

daryl@cichlid.org

A very special friend of mine sent me a link to a podcast recently. Although it mostly focuses on salt-water fish, I found it very interesting; I hope you will too (cichlids do get a mention).



Fishing for feelings – the many ways fish are smarter than you think.

(Click the logo to listen.)

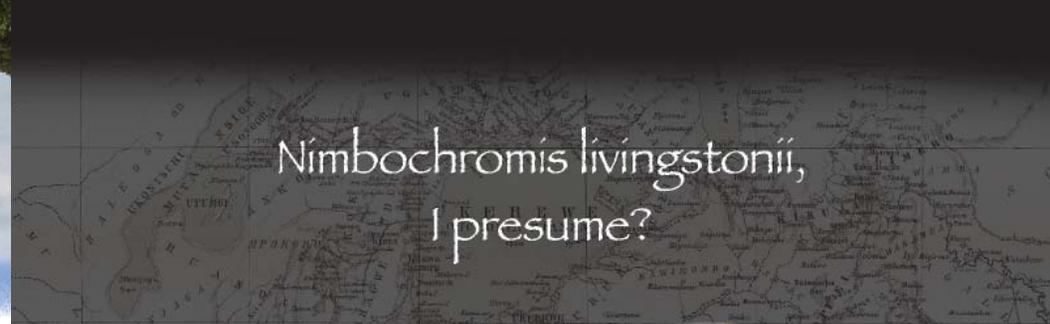
The podcast is from the Australian national broadcaster's (ABC) show called *Conversations*, in December 2025. From a the episode is titled 'Holiday Listening: Fishing

for feelings – the many ways fish are smarter than you think.' A talk with Dr Culum Brown, Marine Biologist, Macquarie University, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia.

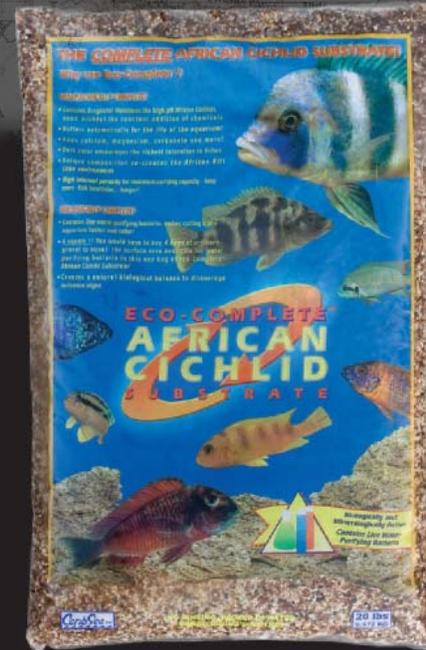
Dr Culum Brown is a leading researcher in the field of fish cognition, his research has shown that even the smallest fish are capable of learning and can retain memories for months.

His fascination for fish stems from growing up in parts of south-east Asia, where he would spend every possible hour in the ocean with a snorkel.

As an adult, Culum's studies around the world have revealed many facts which challenge our common understanding of fish.



Nimbochromis livingstonii, I presume?



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Krobia from the Guiana shield

By Willem Heijns

Introduction

When I decided to write an article on *Krobia*, I thought it would be quite straightforward. Nothing could be further from the truth, as I soon found out. A lot of problems surround this interesting cichlid genus. The nationality (if something like that exists), the number of species and even the identity of the genus can all be challenged. Let me explain ...

Country of origin

Biological research is often organized by country. Many studies present their results as being related to a specific country. The original description of *Krobia* appears in a book called *The cichlids of Surinam*. But what exactly is Surinam, or better: Suriname?

Suriname has been a Dutch colony since 1667. Its eastern boundary (with the French colony Guiana) is formed by the river Marowijne (or Maroni in French). But how far can you travel upstream on the Maroni? And where is its origin? The upstream parts of many rivers carry different names. And the Maroni is no exception. Travelling upstream, every split

(where two rivers join) requires a decision as to which one is the main channel. At Stoelmanseiland, the Tapanahony and the Lawa join to form the Maroni. In 1860 the French authorities raised the question whether the Tapanahony or the Lawa was the main channel (and thereby the border between Suriname and French Guiana). A joint committee came to the conclusion in 1861 that the Lawa was to be considered as such. But then in 1885, gold was found in the area between the two rivers. And the agreement turned into a conflict. So it was decided to call on a referee to solve the issue. No one less than Tsar Alexander III of Russia was asked to provide this solution. He decided in favor of Suriname: the Lawa is the border river.

Travelling further upstream, one gets to Antecume Pata where the Litanie and the Marowini join to become the Lawa. Alexander III had not looked far enough upstream for his decision. To this day the French still claim the Litanie to be the border with Suriname, a claim Suriname obviously rejects. For Su-



riname, the Marowini is the border ... the impasse continues.

The relevance of this border issue for the present article is that Puyo (1943) described *Aequidens itanyi* “d’après la rivière où elle a été découverte”, giving the location as “une crique du haut Itany”. So, in the view of Suriname this species would be a Surinamese (“Dutch?”) cichlid and in the French view the country of origin would be French Guiana. Puyo did not preserve any specimens. This lack of specimens and the vague indication of the type locality

caused Kullander & Nijssen (1989) to designate a neotype for their *Krobia itanyi*. They chose a Surinamese (left bank) creek into the Maroni 6 km north of Stoelmanseiland as the type locality. Problem solved.

Incidentally, a similar problem exists at Suriname’s western border. Here, a substantial area (called Tigri) is disputed between Suriname and (British) Guyana originating from insufficient knowledge about the upper parts of the Corantijn (the accepted border river between the two countries). But this border conflict is the least of Guyana’s territorial issues.

When King Carlos III of Spain rearranged his overseas possessions in South America (known as the Viceroyalty of New Granada), he created the Captaincy General de Venezuela as a separate entity with its eastern border at the Essequibo river. The British colonizers of the Guyanas never accepted this border and sent Robert Schomburgk there in the late 1830s to explore the area and define the border as they saw it. This border became known as the Schomburgk line, which corresponds well with the present border between the two former colonies. In 1899, an international commission was appointed to settle the border dispute. The commission decided in favor of the British and confirmed the Schomburgk line as being the border. The situation seemed to be accepted, but in 1963, when Guyana was about to become independent, Venezuela saw a chance to reopen the conflict. It rejected the 1899 decision and again



undescribed species. One of these (BMNH 1861.5.1.8) was used by Charles Tate Regan (1905) to describe *Acara guianensis*. The country of origin was given as “Guiana”. The collection in ZMB from which this specimen was drawn, was most likely made by Richard Schomburgk (indeed, Robert’s brother) on his trip to Guyana from 1840 to 1844. The fish collection of this trip was evaluated by Müller & Troschel (in Schomburgk 1848). Of the four *Acara* species listed by them, one (*Acara tetramerus*) is easily confused with *Krobia guianensis* and may very well have been among the duplicates sent to BMNH. Schomburgk found

claimed the area. And it was by no means small, occupying the larger part of Guyana, as shown in the darker areas on the map above. The discovery of oil in 2015 complicated matters even more. The conflict is ongoing and it might escalate, since Venezuela held a referendum in late 2023, in which the people could vote for the annexation of the “Guayana Esequiba” province. They voted for it.

The relevance of all this to the present article is again the country of origin of a *Krobia* species. In 1861, the British Museum of Natural History (BMNH) received a number of “duplicates” from the Zoologisches Museum zu Berlin (ZMB). Several of the specimens belonged to as yet

this species in three different lakes: Tapakuma and Capoey (Pomeroon drainage) and Amuku (Rupununi drainage). Neither of these lakes have so far yielded any other *Krobia* species, although *Aequidens tetramerus* has been found near all of them. Anyway, both the Pomeroon and the Rupununi lie within the area claimed by Venezuela. Should Venezuela eventually get hold of the claimed area, the country of origin for *Krobia guianensis* should be changed to Venezuela.

The eastern Guiana shield

Instead of looking at political units (countries), it is better to work with natural areas when studying cichlids. In this case it concerns the eastern

part of the Guiana shield, a highland area roughly bordered by the Atlantic Ocean and by the Orinoco and lower Amazonas rivers. The eastern part of the Guiana shield has rivers flowing into the Atlantic from the northern and eastern slopes and a few rivers flowing into the lower Amazonas from the southern slope. There’s *Krobia* in most of these rivers.

Krobia species from the eastern Guiana shield

When Regan (1905) described *Acara guianensis* he only had the one specimen (BMNH 1861.1.5.8) mentioned above at his disposal. But this was not the only *Acara* from this area. In the same paper, Regan (1905) listed *Acara vittata* from Guiana (and also from the Amazon and Paraguay). How did *Acara vittata*

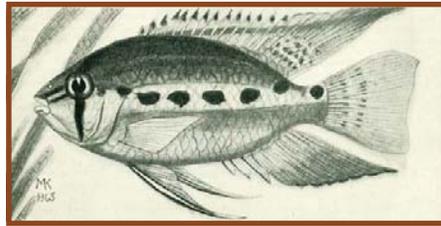
(now in *Bujurquina* and native only to Paraguay and Argentina) make it to the Guyanas? Well, Jacques Pellegrin may be responsible for this. In his revision of the family Cichlidae (Pellegrin 1904) he listed *Acara vittata* in the fish collection of MNHN in Paris. The specimens concerned were collected by Geay in 1899/1903 in French Guiana, by André in 1877 in Colombia and by Jobert in 1878 in Brasil. Regan (1905) apparently did not examine the specimens in MNHN, so he followed Pellegrin in his identification. Pellegrin certainly was no splitter, because he also synonymized *Acara sypilus* with *vittata*, which he illustrated by mentioning yet another *vittata* specimen from the Río Zamora in Ecuador, in the collection of BMNH. Obviously, this has later been adjusted by the



Guianensis Coropina

Photo: Wolfgang Staeck

museum. The specimens from Geay are now catalogued as *guianensis*, the ones from André as *mariae* and the one from Jobert as *syspilus*. The specimen in BMNH became the type of *Acara zamorensis* Regan 1905.

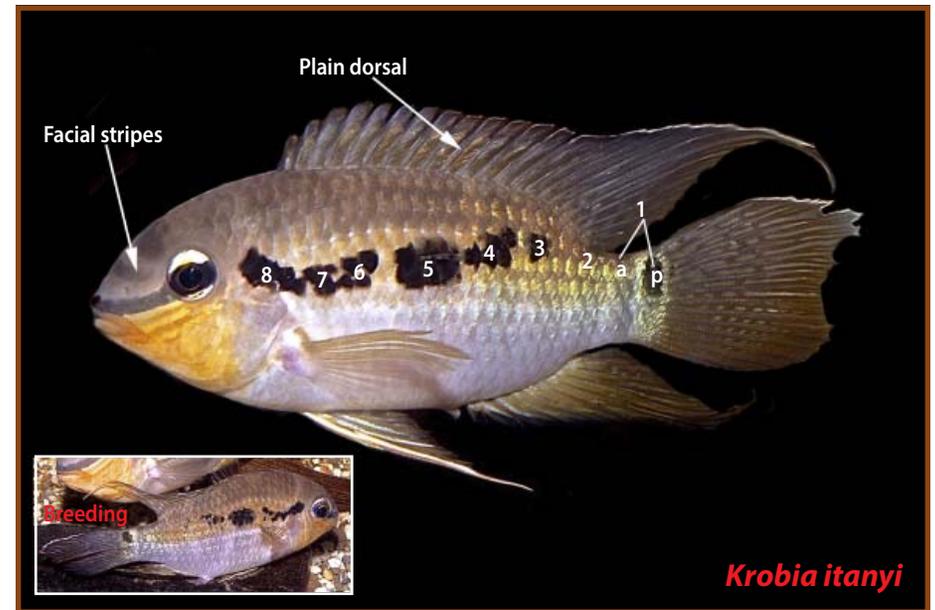
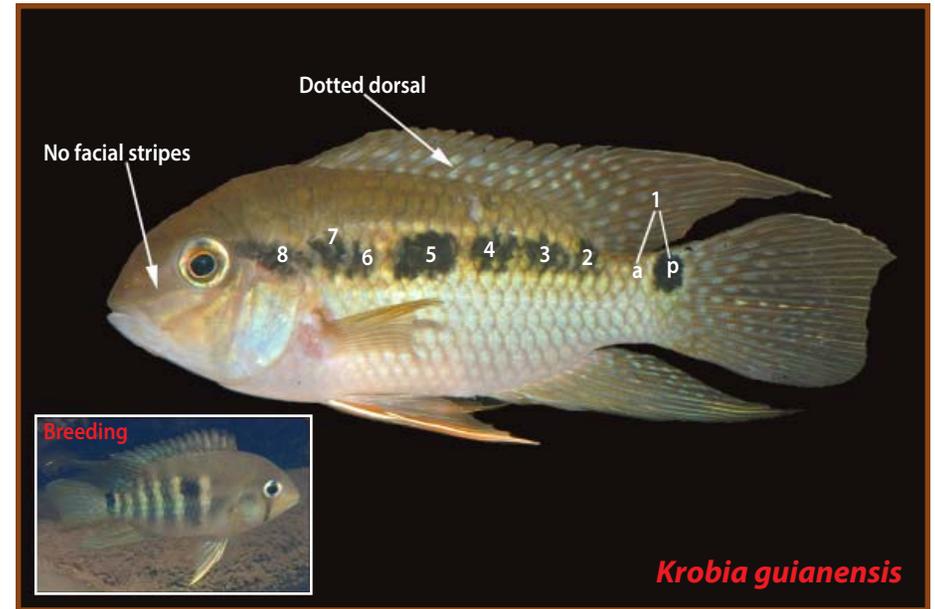


But before this adjustment, the misunderstanding was to last for quite a while. Eigenmann (1910) lists *Aequidens vittatus* from “Colombia to Guiana; Amazon and Paraguay”, while omitting *guianensis*. Eigenmann (1912) adds additional specimens of *vittatus* which he collected in the Demerara in Guyana. He recognizes *guianensis* but claims not to have found it in this country.

Almost 60 years later, Lowe-McConnell (1969) published a paper on the cichlids of Guyana. She still lists *Aequidens vittatus* as present there and compares the specimens she collected with the only available specimen of *Aequidens guianensis* (the holotype). She believes the two species to be distinct, based of the dorsal and anal fin squamation, *guianensis* having these fins scaly at the base and *vittatus* having naked fins. After another 20 years, Kullander & Nijssen (1989) found that the fin squamation in their *Krobia guianensis* is much more variable than Lowe-McConnell (1969) assumed and that all (former) *vittatus* in Guyana are

in fact *guianensis*. The difference between the two species lies in the position of the lateral line canals on the caudal fin and in “overall aspect”. And of course the distribution range. Exit *vittatus*.

The second *Krobia* species was described as *Aequidens itanyi* by Puyo (1943). This author was the first to compare his species with *guianensis*, although he was not aware of it. He made the comparison with *vittatus* (sensu Eigenmann). Meinken (1963) presented *Aequidens itani* (sic) from Suriname in a German aquarium magazine. Kullander & Nijssen (1989) believed this to be a misidentification of *guianensis*, a view followed by many others. This may have been caused by the drawing in Meinken (above), showing a *Krobia* with a blotchy lateral stripe running to the end of the dorsal fin base. Kullander & Nijssen (1989) apparently had no live specimens available, although these have been collected in Suriname in several rivers (next page).



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It can be seen from these images that the two species are relatively easy to distinguish.

The horizontal stripe in *guianensis* runs to the posterior base of the dorsal fin (to bar 2), whereas in *itanyi* it is shorter (to bar 4 and sometimes bar 3) and has a blotchy character. The spiny part of the dorsal fin is spotted in *guianensis* and plain in *itanyi*. Facial (preorbital and interorbital) stripes are usually hardly (if at all) visible in *guianensis* and prominent in *itanyi*. Breeding coloration is even easier (see picture inset). In *guianensis* the vertical bars are dominant; in *itanyi* no vertical bars are present. Bar/spot numbers follow Řičan et al. 2005.

About 70 years after *itanyi*, the next *Krobia* species was described. Actually, one year before this, *Krobia xinguensis* was described, but this

species is not found in the Guiana shield and therefore does not fall within the scope of this article. *Krobia petitella* Steele et al 2013 owes its name to the fact that the lateral stripe is close to the (anterior) upper lateral line and even overlaps the (posterior) upper lateral line. It is found in the middle part of the Berbice River. See below for a discussion of the distribution of *Krobia* species.

So we have three described *Krobia* species in the eastern Guiana shield. But there are more of them. European (mostly German and French) aquarists have extensively travelled in French Guiana and found *Krobia* in just about every river, albeit mostly close to the Atlantic coast. These appeared to be quite variable in coloration, so it is rather difficult to decide whether one or more species are involved. The consensus seems to be that one form, dubbed “red eye”,

can be found from the Mana in western Guiana to the Approuague in the east. The most intense red eye color is found in the central part of these rivers (Kourou).

The Oyapock is the border river of French Guiana with Brazil. Here another *Krobia* form is found, aptly called “oyapock”. Kullander & Nijssen (1989) stated that “two undescribed species are recognized in material from French Guiana”. The red eye and oyapock forms may very well represent these two species.

The identity of *Krobia*

In an ideal world, cichlid genera are established for (stable) monophyletic species groups, which are diagnosable using (preferably shared, derived) phenotypic characters (Vences et al. 2013). When Kullander & Nijssen (1989) established *Krobia*, no phylogenetic analysis was available to

determine whether the two included species (*guianensis* and *itanyi*) form a monophyletic group. A few “phylogenetic” notes on morphology were presented, merely indicating derived or plesiomorphic characters. But the paper does contain a diagnosis of *Krobia*. A diagnosis can be useful to distinguish a genus (from other genera), but it does not define it, as the following example will show.

In 2008 a discussion arose on the generic assignment of two species: *Aequidens potaroensis* Eigenmann 1912 and *Aequidens paloemeuensis* Kullander & Nijssen 1989. Musilová et al. (2009) assigned these to *Krobia* based on a phylogenetic analysis of both molecular and morphological characters.

The molecular phylogenetic tree clearly shows a monophyletic *Krobia* (including *potaroensis*) as the sister



Red eye Soumourou

Photo: Florent de Gasperis



Oyapock

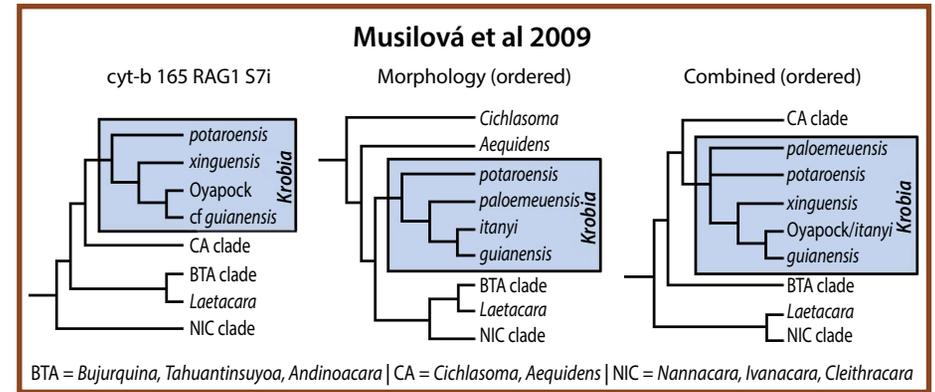
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taxon to the CA clade. Unfortunately, *paloemeuensis* was not in their molecular analysis. The morphological tree does have *paloemeuensis* (and *itanyi*), but now *xinguensis* and *Oyapock* are left out. Kullander (2012) criticizes this result by saying that in the analysis by Musilová et al. (2009), 49 out of the 96 morphological characters in the analysis were unknown for the two species at hand and one was inapplicable. But that still leaves 46 informative characters for the analysis. Kullander rejects the assignment to *Krobia*, but does not

provide a species level phylogeny for *Krobia*.

Taking a closer look at the diagnoses, the next picture shows a selection from the diagnostic characters of both *Aequidens* (from Kullander 1986) and *Krobia* (from Kullander & Nijssen 1989).

Checking *paloemeuensis* and *potaroensis* against these characters gives a dualistic result. Five characters link the two species to *Aequidens* and another five tie them to *Krobia*. Technically, both species neither fit

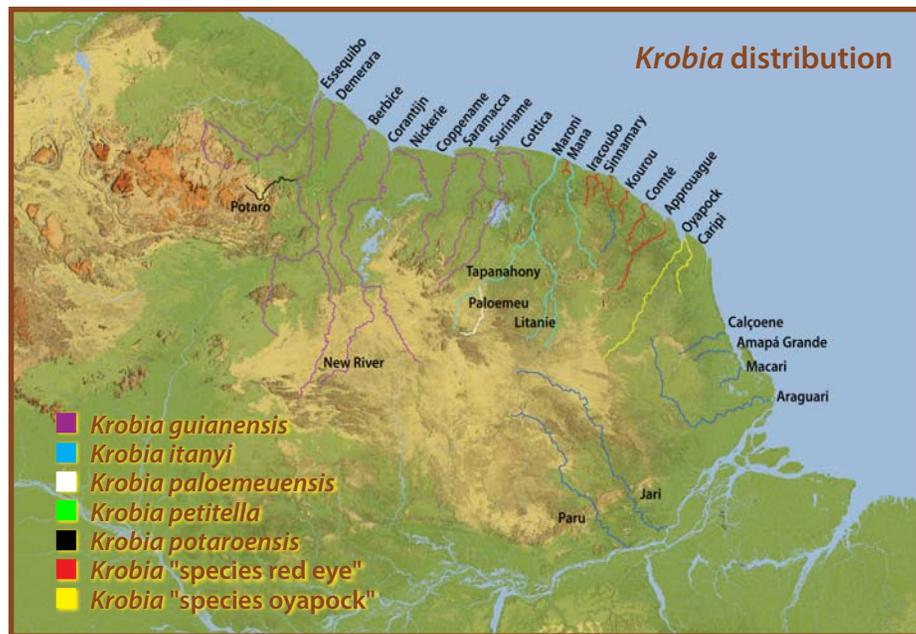
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Diagnostic characters			
	Aequidens (Kullander 1986)		Krobia (Kullander & Nijssen 1989)
	predorsal scales triserial	← potaroensis paloemeuensis	→ predorsal scales uniserial
	24 longitudinal scales	paloemeuensis+ potaroensis	→ 23 longitudinal scales
	vertical fins naked	← paloemeuensis+ potaroensis	vertical fins naked (dorsal fin scaled)
	13+13 (12+13) vertebrae	paloemeuensis+ potaroensis	→ 12+13 vertebrae
	no frontal stripes	paloemeuensis+ potaroensis	→ 3 frontal stripes
	cheekspot	paloemeuensis+ potaroensis	→ suborbit al stripe
	lateral band to caudal	← paloemeuensis+ potaroensis	lateral band (blotchy) to dorsal
	4-5 bars posterior midlateral blotch (included)	← paloemeuensis+ potaroensis	4 bars posterior midlateral blotch
	no hyoid furrow	← paloemeuensis+ potaroensis	hyoid furrow



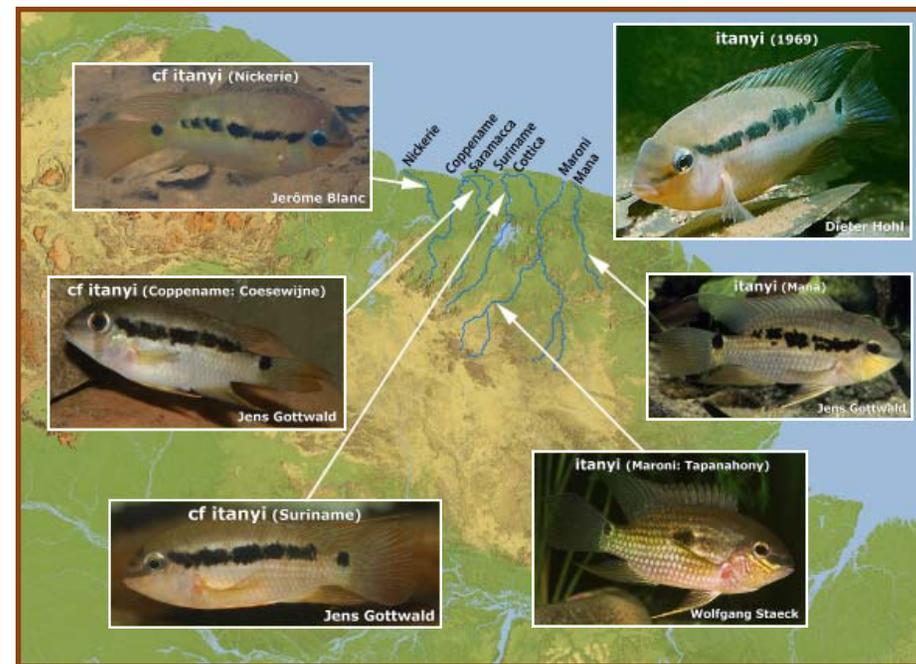
in *Aequidens* nor in *Krobia* using the current diagnoses. In this case the diagnoses are clearly not appropriate to distinguish the two genera and reliably assign the two species to either one of them. So, if the phylogeny of Musilová et al. (2009) turns out to be stable, *paloemeuensis* and *potaroensis* should be assigned to *Krobia*, even if they do not fit the published *Krobia* diagnosis. Maybe it is best for this generic diagnosis to be revised.

Krobia distribution range

To further illustrate the importance and hazards of diagnoses: Bragança et al (2014) published a paper claiming an extension of the distribution range of *Krobia guianensis*, now including the Araguari drainage. They start with rectifying an omission supposedly made by Kul-

lander & Nijssen (1989) not having provided a formal diagnosis for *guianensis*. Their (newly proposed) diagnosis states that *guianensis* differs from *itanyi* and *petitella* by the lateral stripe ending at the posterior base of the dorsal fin and from *xinguensis* by the absence of the spots on the lower jaw and by the absence of red marks on the side of the head and body. The diagnosis does not mention the obsolete facial stripes and the more extensively dotted fins of *guianensis* as noted by Kullander & Nijssen (1989). And that is precisely what their picture 3 (UFRJ 8844) shows: facial stripes and (almost) immaculate fins. This surely is not *Krobia guianensis*.

So where does that leave our *Krobia* species of the eastern Guiana shield? The above map roughly shows where



they can be found. From the Essequibo in the west to the Cottica in the east, *Krobia guianensis* occurs, interrupted by *Krobia petitella* in the middle part of the Demerara and by *Krobia potaroensis* in the Potaro. The Maroni/Mana drainage is home to *Krobia itanyi*, with *Krobia paloemeuensis* in the Paloemeu. East of this drainage no formally described *Krobia* are found. Coastal rivers in French Guiana have the so-called “red eye” and the Oyapock has a form of its own. Further to the east several Brazilian rivers also house *Krobia* as indicated on the map. It is not clear whether these all belong to one species or not.

Interestingly, *Krobia itanyi* may not be restricted to the Maroni/Mana

drainage. In Suriname, *itanyi* like *Krobia* have been found as early as the 1960s and more recently in the Nickerie, Coesewijne and Suriname rivers. They have the interorbital stripes of *itanyi*, lack the dotted dorsal fin of *guianensis* and the lateral stripe ends at the base of the dorsal fin (in bar 2) as in *guianensis*, thus showing characters of both species.

Kullander & Nijssen (1989) have apparently missed this variation in Surinamese *Krobia*. In addition, Staeck (1998) reports on *Krobia itanyi* found in the Tapanahony in southern Suriname, strikingly different in coloration from *itanyi* in French Guiana. So, either *Krobia itanyi* is extremely variable or we may have multiple species at hand.

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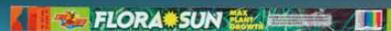


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- 3) Each ACA Gift Membership recipient will then receive an ACA Gift Member e-mail with a copy to the gift-giver, followed by e-mail welcome letters from the ACA and CRC.

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Kentucky Fish Convention (KFC) Lexington, Kentucky, June 25-28, 2026

The next American Cichlid Association Convention will be held in Lexington, Kentucky on June 25-29, 2026 hosted by the Blue Grass Fish Keepers Association and the Louisville Tropical Fish Fanciers, Inc in conjunction with the American Livebearer Association and the International Betta Congress. So, we have three of the largest national tropical fish organizations in the United States together again. Woo-hoo! The Midwest is always a popular venue and the majority of our members can easily drive to the event. Southern hospitality will be served up at its finest!

Early-Bird

The Convention will be very similar to the ones we have held in the past, but with a few changes. For the early-birds we will have a special event planned for Wednesday evening with a Bluegrass Pizza party and live music entertainment and some bourbon tasting on the side. Limited tickets will be available on a first-come, first-served basis on the website. Hospitality is what we do well here in Kentucky so plan on having a good time.

Auctions

Everyone can expect to see the Rare Livebearer auction on Friday night and the world-famous BABES auction on late night. The biggest change is on Sunday. There will not be a Sunday Auction, but a large SWAP MEET will be held in its place. Free entrance for convention attendees and a nominal charge for the public to attend the Swap. Purchase of Swap tables will be on

the website as well. You can expect to see all three groups (ACA, ALA and IBC) with tables loaded with rare cichlids, livebearers and bettas. The Midwest does Swaps better than anyone!

Expect to see some of the greatest speakers in the land lecturing on our beloved cichlids, livebearers and bettas.

Cichlid Show

Last year in Texas the cichlids did not have a fish show which was a first in many years. Well, this year, not only will you get to see the Livebearer and Betta Show but Cichlids are back! The Cichlid show will be limited to 50 tanks with only three classes and participants are limited to three entries.

The classes consist of the following:

- Class 1:** Cichlids under 4". For example, Tanganyika shell-dwellers, *Apistogramma* etc.
- Class 2:** Cichlids 4-8" TL, for example *Pseudotropheus zebra*, *Thorichthys meeki*.
- Class 3:** Large Cichlids over 8" TL, for example, Oscars, red devils etc.

What we hope to accomplish is to have excellent, beautiful fish and some fierce competition. An Aqueon tank will be provided, either 10 or 20 gallons with black sand, Swiss sponge filter with air and LED lighting and covered tops. So now is the time to start conditioning those special fish for the show.

Banquet Information

One of my good fish friends (John Sabo) from Canada often talked about a "bucket list" item for him. John was a Chef and unfortunately now deceased, but he always wanted to eat Kentucky Fried Chicken in Kentucky so I know he would be smiling knowing that at the banquet we will be serving fried chicken that is actually fried in Kentucky but not the Yum brand KFC chicken. Anyhow, the banquet is BUFFET-style with a choice of two salads, Classic Caesar with Garlic Croutons and Grated Parmesan or Spinach with Bacon, Hard-boiled Egg and Balsamic Dressing. Main course is Crispy Fried Chicken and Broiled Tilapia with a Lemon Caper butter sauce. Yes, Cichlids on the menu! In addition, Chef-selected starch and vegetable and a dessert of old-fashioned Kentucky Derby Pie or New York-style Cheesecake.

Clarion Hotel Conference Center North

The Clarion Hotel reservations can be secured by telephoning 859-977-9114. Our group room rate is \$105.00 per night. The bourbon trail and horses are literally in the backyard. Kentucky's bluegrass region is filled with rolling fields and the state's oldest landmarks and traditions. Known as the "Horse Capital of the World". The hotel has 11 conference rooms with an onsite bar and restaurant and affordable pricing. Pets are welcomed! Breakfast is included with every reservation. Scrambled eggs, sausage, bacon, biscuits and gravy, potatoes, toast, bagels, Danish, muffins, waffles, cereals, yogurt, milk, assorted juices and fruits all included. Register before the block of rooms is sold out.

Tours

There will be two tours available for attendees. The drive alone for both tours will include some beautiful sites of the racehorse farms that are abundant in the Lexington area. Thursday's tour will be to the Woodford Reserve Distillery where you'll taste five award-winning whiskies alongside a simple bite to explore the nuances of bourbon and flavor pairing. Designed by the Master Distiller it is sure to be a true spectacle for your senses! You must be 21 years of age to sample the bourbons. Friday there will be a collecting trip for native fishes, led by an expert in the field, to some of the local streams in the area. A valid Kentucky fishing license will be needed if you plan to collect fish on this very limited trip. (Only 26 spots available spots.)

The Kentucky Fish Convention (KFC) and the Bluegrass Bash is officially in the works. Keep in mind that we are not associated with the popular Kentucky Fried Chicken corporation of Yum Brands! The initials just happen to spell out Kentucky Fish Convention. Save the Date ... June 25-28, 2026 and watch for the opening of the website soon at convention.cichlid.org. I hope to see everyone in Lexington next Summer. Cichlids, Livebearers and Bettas ... here we come!

Rusty Wessel

6815 Carolyn Road, Louisville, KY 40214
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2. Click your name in the Welcome Panel
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(You can also choose to have your membership update automatically via the ACA-PayPal system.)

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Do you have some fish news too small for an article in *BB* (or needs to get out quickly, but more permanently than social media), a local event, etc?

Submit it to ACA News:

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... courtesy of Zoo Med



and available from Back Issues

Thorichthys callolepis, the blue one ...

By Alain Koehl

In 2010, I took my first trip to Mexico. We went on a grand tour, passing through Villahermosa, Tuxtla Gutiérrez, the Pacific coast, Matias Romero, Catemaco and finally Palenque. From Palenque, we headed back to Villahermosa for the return journey. On the way back, I had the pleasure of experiencing the Eyjafjallajökull volcano episode, which blocked all air traffic. It was during this trip that I discovered the wildlife of the Coatzacoalcos River for the first time. I took advantage of this trip to follow a friend who had already made several trips there.

So, I let my friend choose the places to visit. To this day, I don't know why he chose to visit Santa Maria de Chimalapa. It is an hour's drive

Thorichthys callolepis Santa Maria Chimalapa (from the top): SMC; SMC season 2025 young; SMC one year old; SMC 2011; SMC 2008; SMC 2007.



Thorichthys callolepis, Rio El Ajal 2023

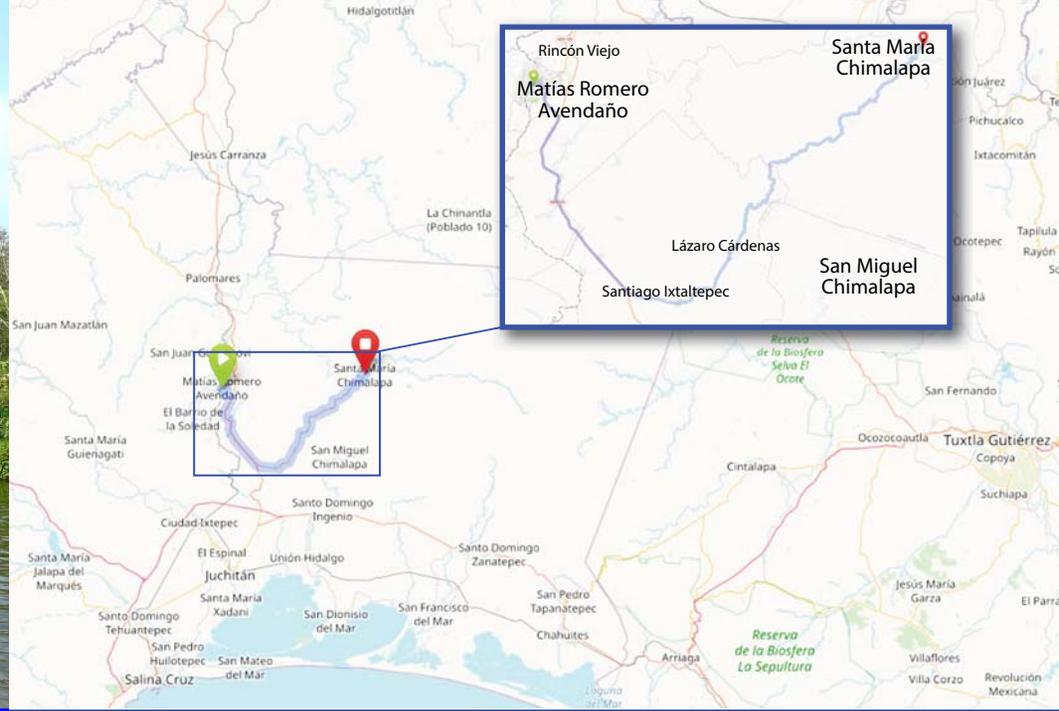
from Matias Romero to Santa Maria de Chimalapa. The problem was that no one had thought to check the car's fuel tank. Since we didn't know where we were going, we had no idea how much fuel we would need for the trip. At that time, there was no internet to help us plan our trips. When we arrived in Santa Maria, we realised that we did not have enough fuel to make it back to Matias Romero. This village is the first and last one on this road. We started looking for petrol in the village. We found a young man who agreed to help us and found some petrol. We offered him a reward of a few hundred pesos. At first, he refused. We suggested he give it

to his mother. He finally accepted. We asked him if there was anything we could do for him. He asked us to take him to the balneario where he had some friends. So, we ended up where we wanted to be.

So here we are at the riverbank, surrounded by Mexicans relaxing. Two rivers meet at this spot. Some Mexicans are washing their cars. Sandbags hold back the water to form a pool. We try to find a peaceful spot to observe the aquatic wildlife. There are clearly two species of *Thorichthys*. The most remarkable is the *T. callolepis* species. We will obtain several specimens from this location. Only one will survive and grow. Its body covered with blue spots makes



Some locals enjoying a day at the river – Santa Maria de Chimalapa in 2010.



How to get to Santa Maria de Chimalapa.

Map: © OpenStreetMap.

me want to return to this same spot on a future trip in 2012. However, we will see very few *Thorichthys*. We will come across fishermen with large *Vieja coatlicue*, unfortunately dead. They will make a good meal for our Mexican friends.

I am still a little disappointed with this last trip. I made another attempt in 2012 but without much success in terms of observing *Thorichthys callolepis*. I just came across some local fishermen with some good-sized *Vieja coatlicue* they had just caught.

I'll have to wait until 2023 to return to the same place. Things have changed a lot. The reservoir is still there. We will arrive very early in the morning. It is the middle of the week. We will be alone for the few hours we spend there. No beautiful photos taken. No breeding pairs. Our German friends who visited a few weeks earlier had seen breeding pairs but were unable to take any good photographs.

Recently, I also added some pellets to enhance the colour of the fish. Nothing remarkable during this period. The young remain in groups and chase each other from time to time. *Thorichthys callolepis* does not have sexual dimorphism. We therefore have to wait until they reach 5-6 cm to observe the dorsal and ventral fins. In males, these fins tend to end in a point.

From this last trip, we obtained juveniles measuring 2-3 cm. We will have to raise them with care. They are fed the same diet as the other *Thorichthys* that I raise, i.e. pellets that are not too fatty. Spirulina pellets are added to these pellets. Re-

This fin criterion is not a certainty. I currently have a pair that is breeding, and apart from the size of the two partners, there is nothing to differentiate them. The only indicator that they are indeed a pair is that they are currently laying eggs.



A freshly caught *Vieja coatlicue*.



Santa Maria de Chimalapa in 2012.



Santa Maria de Chimalapa in 2023.

The group is large enough for several pairs to form. As with all *Thorichthys*, the eggs are laid on any type of surface that has been cleaned beforehand. The eggs take several days to hatch. The parents fan the eggs and guard them. No one is allowed to approach, their area of the aquarium becomes a restricted zone. I quickly remove a few juveniles from these first clutches for conservation purposes. Unfortunately, this species does not interest all aquarists. It is true that if the tank volume is insufficient, the fish may fight, even kill each other. Fortunately, the tank is large enough for everyone to find their place.

At one point during maintenance, they became very shy and it was difficult to observe them so they had to be moved. This happens from time to time in groups of *Thorichthys*. Their shyness remained, even with the addition of companions in the aquarium. To accompany the *Thorichthys*, I like to add livebearers, either guppies or *Xiphophorus*. A ball of filament normally used for filtration is added so that some young livebearers can escape the appetite of the *Thorichthys*.

I am happy now because I have this species in my aquariums with enough young to ensure that this beautiful fish is not lost. That is a blessing. This year has been a terrible

year for my aquariums. The *Thorichthys callolepis* have developed abscesses all over their bodies, and only one wild specimen remains from the group I originally acquired. I tried several medications without any real success. I used UV lamps to sterilise the environment for the survivors. At first glance, the losses have stopped. No more abscesses on some fish, no more big bellies on others. The cloud has passed, but it has left its mark.

Breeding *T. callolepis* is no different from breeding other *Thorichthys* species. Fry left in the care of their parents quickly disappear. They do not seem to be good parents in the aquarium. However, if you opt for a floating incubator, you will be able to

see the female watching over the eggs. During this period, no other spawning will be possible. However, this behavior is not specific to this species. Creating water movement in the tank is important for the proper maintenance of these fish. Depending on the size of the parents, the larvae may be quite small at birth. At first, it is best to feed them micro worms. This promotes better growth. They will then quickly accept *Artemia* nauplii without any problems. As soon as they are large enough, you should add the flakes used to feed the parents. The flakes should be ground into powder. Adding a few water snails to the breeding tank prevents uneaten food from polluting the water.



My first spawning of *Thorichthys callolepis* from the Rio Negro.



Thorichthys callolepis from Rio Sarabia.

Photo: Jacques Blanc.

Thorichthys callolepis can be found in the following rivers:

- Rio Almoloya (flows into the Rio El Ajal)
- Rio El Ajal (flows into the Rio Grande)
- Rio Grande (flows into the Rio El Corte)
- Rio El Corte (becomes the Rio Coatzacoalcos)
- Rio Negro (becomes the Rio El Corte), which flows near Santa Maria de Chimalapa.
- Rio Malatengo
- Rio Chalchijiapa (also known as Rio Carolino)
- Rio Sarabia (may be redder than other *T. callolepis* species)

It is found alongside these other cichlids:

- *Vieja regani*
- *Vieja coaticue*
- *Paratheraps bulleri*
- *Thorichthys panchovillai* (the famous blue, gold, and green mixteco ... it seems that *T. callolepis* can be found only with the blue mixteko)
- *Trichromis salvini*
- *Amphilophis trimaculatum*

I was able to observe *T. callolepis* in the Rio el Ajal. In 2023, there were still many breeding pairs with *Thorichthys panchovillai* at the Balneario. I also observed it in the Rio Grande. I was able to film a breeding pair, which you can view on

my [YouTube channel \(youtube.com/watch?v=ZpXIn0QJSjs\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZpXIn0QJSjs). In the Malatengo River, I saw videos taken by a traveling companion who had spotted *T. callolepis* in this river. During our dive, he pointed out *Thorichthys* to me. His eyesight is not very good, so he could not tell the difference between the two species. As a result, I don't have any good videos from this river.

I have another strain of *Thorichthys callolepis*. They were obtained from the El Ajal River. It is named after the town of El Ajal, which it flows through. Further on, it is called the Rio Grande because it flows through the city of Rio Grande, which is located on the edge of the

highway between the Pacific and the highway to Mexico City. I have two old fish left that have lost some of their color. One of them survived an epidemic of bloated bellies in its aquarium.

To prepare for our 2023 trip, we asked our friend Jacques Blanc, a seasoned traveller, which species we should focus on. He suggested the Rio Sarabia, where he had observed a *T. callolepis* that was redder than those seen in other rivers. The photo he sent us is shown above. Jacques has made many trips, some with Jean-Claude Nourrissat and Patrick de Rham. We travelled with him to Guatemala in 2013.



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