



Mbuna Cichlid

Gromphadorhina portentosa



We live in the Discovery Center at the Racine Zoo. There are over 70 of us swimming in our tank, and we come in a variety of bright colors and patterns.

We are collectively referred to as **Mbuna** because we are several different species of cichlid (rather than just one) that are found only in Lake Malawi in southeastern Africa.

Mbuna (pronounced Mmm-boo-nah) means **"rockfish"** in the language of the Tonga people of Malawi .

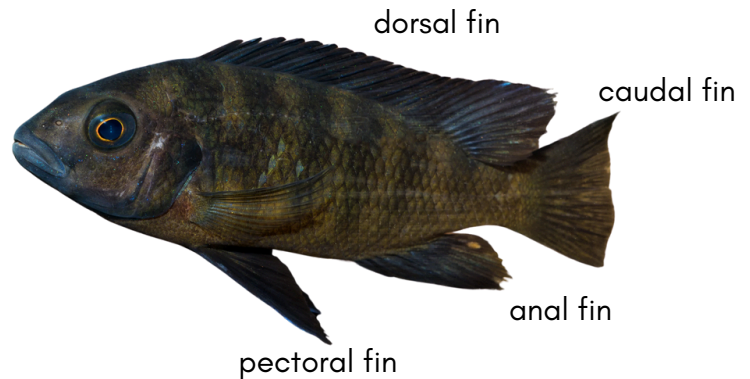
CICHLIDS AT A GLANCE



- Most species of cichlid are sexually dimorphic. Males are brightly colored while females are a subdued hue.
- Bright colored, patterned males have the best fitness to breed with other females.
- Like all fish, they have gills, which allows them to breath underwater. They are made up of capillaries that pick up oxygen dissolved in the water.
- Cichlids breathe by opening their mouths and pushing water to their gills.
- Cichlids, like most fish, have five different fins on its body: pectoral, caudal, ventral, anal, and dorsal
- Our favorite food at the zoo are fish pellets.



Adult:
2.5 to 18 inches
depending of species



Avg. life expectancy in native habitats: 2-5 years
Avg. life expectancy in human care: 2-5 years

WHERE ARE NATIVE CICHLID HABITATS LOCATED?



This group of cichlid are only found in Lake Malawi in southeastern Africa. Due to this being the only area they are found naturally, they are known as an endemic species. They make their homes in crevices among piles of stones on the rocky shores.

Cichlid Behavior

HIDING

In our native habitat, we inhabit rock piles and rocky shores of Lake Malawi. We like to “lay” down and rest in the crevices.

If we are not swimming and still, it's just means we are resting or are comfortable.



EGGS IN MOUTH?

Cichlids are mouthbrooders. Females will protect and incubate her eggs in her mouth.

We will refrain from eating or moving too much until eggs hatch.



DEFENSE

We are very territorial. There will be a dominant male that will protect its territory to attract a female.

We may be aggressive towards each other. We will push each other around to say, “this is my area”.



COLORATION

Males have the ability to adjust the vibrancy of their color pattern depending on their “pecking order” in the tank.

The cichlid with the brightest colors is the dominant one of the group.



- Females of different species prefer males with bright colors and specific patterns.
- Males perform distinctive courtship rituals by moving sand in a particular way to attract potential mates.
- Almost all cichlid species of Lake Malawi are descendants of one species that was isolated in the lake. As water levels rise, new rocky habitats will become inhabited, leading to new species.

Cichlid Conservation

Mbuna cichlids face many threats in Lake Malawi including water pollution related to agricultural runoff, overfishing by local industries, and even soil erosion. Overfishing and demand from the pet industry has decreased the genetic diversity of populations in the wild.

Their conservation status varies depending on the species. At least 300 species of cichlids have gone extinct, and the status of 458 species range from **Least Concern** to **Endangered**. Meanwhile, many species have not even been cataloged at all.

How can we help?

Lake Malawi is part of the African Great Lakes, just like how Lake Michigan is one of North America’s Great Lakes. One way you can help protect our lakes is to inspect your boat and your belongings before entering the water. We want to prevent the transport of invasive species like zebra mussels that are severely affecting the quality and diversity of the lakes for native species.