
The Scheel Letters, No. 21

Nothobranchius melanospilus [Henry Hansen's stock (or Scheidnass' stock)]

The original "melanospilus" was described in 1896 by Pfeffer from Hamburg. He also described "guentheri" (in 1893). "Melanospilus" came from "Longo Bay" somewhere in Tanganyika. In 1935, in a paper, Ahl claims that "melanospilus" had been confused with another species of Nothobranchius which came from the islands of Seychelles. This island species he calls "seychellensis".

The story of our present stock called "melanospilus" begins with Henry Hansen's voyage to East Africa. He landed in Dar-es-Salam in 1955 and had help from the aquarist Gerry Rowe living at that place. Rowe advised him as to where to collect specimens of Nothobranchius and perhaps we might say that the stock lived not very far from Dar-es-Salam. In an article, Rowe wrote that he found Nothobranchius in pools and water courses which only had water during some parts of the year. The bottom was clay. The yearly rainfall at Dar-es-Salam ("The Climates of the Continents") is 1180 mm, somewhat differing from one year to another. Most rain comes in April which has a mean rainfall of 300 mm and the dry season falls in June-July-Aug. with about 27 mm each month. The mean temperature is 25.5 degrees C (in the air) and the mean temperature reaches the maximum in Feb. (28 C) and the minimum in July-Aug.-Sep. (24 C). The dry season may last from May to Oct. giving very dry weather and the wind blows out of the East or Southeast under an almost cloudless sky. The ground dries out and trees loose their leaves.

Hansen brought back his fish to the USA, but for some reason (a strike?) it (the ship?) did not call at New York. So Hansen had to get rid of most of his fish in Philadelphia where they were sold to a local dealer. There Jack Scheidnass casually dropped in and bought some specimens. Jack did not raise a stock from these fish but he had a few fry that turned out to be males. Later on Jack had another supply of this stock from Henry Hansen who lived in Florida. From these he formed the present stock which was spread as dry eggs to Germany, Denmark, and Hong Kong. Until 1958 this stock was named "guentheri" because Rowe placed that name on the native stock, but later on Rowe informed Scheidnass that he had specimens from the native stock identified as "melanospilus"!!

"Melanospilus" (Hansen's) is a medium sized Notho that possibly might grow up to 7 cm (however my specimens only reached about 6 cm) and also was a somewhat robust species compared with "guentheri" (Griem's) and "palmquisti" (Tropicarium's). In general it reminds one mostly of "orthonotus" (Griem's or Roloff's). The color pattern on the body is very near that of "palmquisti" by the way that the fine red lines on the edges of the scales form a very regular net all over the body. Sides are greenish blue and very

brilliant. However, this Notho, in particular, to a much higher degree than the others I know, does change its colors and also the metallic cast rather much. It seems as if only males which breed take on the typical colors of a Notho. Other males are very pale and rather colorless. Franz Werner wrote me recently that he also found that peculiarity of "melanospilus". The dorsal and anal fins have much red color and little yellow if any. Towards the edges, the color changes into blackish or brownish, but the edge itself mostly is a distinct white and jagged in a way not far from Aphyosemion coeruleum. The caudal fin has a deep red color that sometimes looks a little brownish. The edge is broadly black. The female is grayish brown as are most other known females of this genus, but she has several rather big blackish dots on the hindmost part of her body and even on the root of the caudal fin. These dots sometimes concentrate near the central line of the sides. No doubt this species comes closest to the "orthonotus" ("kuhntae") but at least the males are different in way that we might distinguish clearly between them if we see them together. This species has no spots (or few) on the lower part of the head. The form breeds true.

Just as other Nothos, this form might give you a lot of trouble when the fish start to mature at an age of about 4-8 weeks. Then, very quickly, many of them die without any warning, or they catch lots of Oodinium changing the red lines on the foremost part of the body (scale edges) into a whitish yellowish color, in particular on the head. Well, I use my copper net against this disease and the fish recover normally. Indeed the copper is not at all natural in the aquarium keeping. But it is better keep a live fish under some unnatural conditions than a dead one in a "natural tank". After all, if the fish get through the severe crisis of maturity, they seem to be rather hardy fish. At least my first pair reached an age of 11 months before they died, both within a few days. In common keeping and breeding procedures, this form does not differ from the other Nothos we keep just now.

My stock came in from Jack Scheidnass on 30 May 58 in a small "pill box" (Dr. Meder's pill box) with 9 eggs in dry peat. Eggs hatched the same day in rainwater and gave totally 8 sound fry which grew up as 7 males and 1 female.

- On 17 July 58 I washed out the first eggs (few).
- On 26 July 58 embryo was seen in some of the eggs in glass on shallow water.
- 03 Aug. 58 big embryo with circulation of blood was seen in some eggs. Dried in moist peat.
- 02 Sep. 58 first watering gave many fry. That is about 3 months between first and second generation. Further data on this batch given before. Further spawning until 17 Aug. 58: then female was used in crossings until 07 Sep. 58 (with male "guentheri" (Griem's stock) and male "palmquisti" (Tropicarium stock)).

08-28 Sep. 58: last spawning (in my fishroom). Eggs concentrated and on low water until 12 Oct. 58. And then dried up in peat. First watering on 28 Feb. 59. 01 Mar. 59: lifted out 3 sound fry and 2 belly sliders. Sample washed, found one transparent egg. As in the other species storing (of ripe eggs or eggs which did start the development before drying) for about 4 1/2 to 6 months will kill most embryos or better say resting fry inside eggs under the conditions under which I stored eggs (23-26 C).

- 24 Mar. 59: "red tail" in one of the fry. 20 mm long.

- 29 Mar. 59: 2 males and 1 female. All died medium May 59 from Oodinium etc. But they gave some eggs. Spawning until 13 May 59: 62 eggs washed out of peat. According to the surface structure all are from "melanospilus", but egg size varies.
- 30 May 59: 41 eggs left on shallow water: 2 plus 1 egg without embryo, 26 plus 5 eggs with small and transparent embryo (no blood), 2 plus 5 eggs with bigger embryo with some pigmentation and blood (first number: big eggs; second number: small eggs).
- 11 June 59: 6 eggs have big (ripe?) embryo, 32 eggs have small, transparent embryo, 1 egg has no embryo (yolk deformed, decomposing?).
- 20 June 59: 13 ripe eggs dried up in peat.
- 06 July 59: 21 eggs nearly ripe and 4 still have small and transparent embryo. That will say that after less than 2 months about 90% of the eggs kept on shallow water with free entrance of air are more or less ready to hatch.