

Tateurndina ocellicauda and Mogurnda cingulata

There are just a few gobies that have made it big in the aquarium world. One of those is the peacock goby *Tateurndina ocellicauda*. I remember well the aquarium magazines of the nineties; a multitude of articles praised the beautiful colors of this small goby. Until today it is still a standard item in pet-shops. Occasionally you can also find a representative of the genus *Mogurnda* there, even if it is mostly named generically as *Mogurnda mogurnda* or *M. pulchra*. Although many species of this genus display lots of color, they only are bought rarely, because their reputation as hooligans precedes them.

Same color splendor – different behavior

During the last years I (again) have kept *Tateurndina ocellicauda* and *Mogurnda* cf. *cingulata* “Dekai” also moved in with me. Both species can give joy to their keepers, even if it is in very different ways. They have one thing in common – next to their richness of color –, they belong to the family of sleeper gobies (Eleotridae), and so their pelvic fins are not grown together. As with most sleeper gobies they are not very substrate oriented, but often swim actively in open water. So they definitely are no “bottom fish!”

Tateurndina ocellicauda

I'll start with *T. ocellicauda*. As I mentioned already they are easily obtained in the trade, which is already an indication that they are suitable for a typical community tank. The first time I kept this species was twelve years ago, but I rapidly got the impression that the different breeding lines showed marked signs of degeneration. Also their behavior had become less typical of the species. I can remember that I never was able to get a male that would reliably care for its brood and at some point I lost interest in the species. This changed when I could obtain fishes, which a dedicated goby breeder had selectively bred, especially with respect to their typical behavior and original body shape. This group of ten fishes shares one of my aquariums with a group of *Melanotaenia sexlineata* “Kiunga.”

T. ocellicauda originates from the east of Papua New Guinea. They are occasionally referred to as killi gobies and reach a size of six centimeters; old males occasionally may grow to over seven centimeters. In that case they possess a conspicuous nuchal hump, which gives them an impressive appearance. Younger males show this forehead profile only slightly, so it is not a definite sign of the sexes, because some females can grow quite large too. The definitive me-



Tateurndina ocellicauda
(all photos: Gunnar Loibl)

thod to determine the sex is by observing the genital papilla; I'll come back to that later. Contrary to earlier reports, in which the fish needed some salt added to the water, they feel better in water that is of soft to medium hardness (4–6 °dH ideal, up to 10–12 °dH possible) with a pH around neutral. High temperatures reduce the lifespan; 21 to 24 degrees Celsius are enough. They eat anything that fits their mouth and may often even get used to flake or pellet food, even though they don't seem to enjoy it very much. A densely planted aquarium is important; peacock gobies are often quite skittish in bare tanks.

To breed them I acidify the water slightly with alder cones, but they often breed just fine in pure tap water. Females that

are ready to spawn can be recognized by their round, more strongly yellow colored bellies as well as by their extended genital papilla. They prefer to spawn in narrow holes, I mostly use pieces cut from round cable pipes. The diameter is chosen so the male just fits in, the length of the spawning tube exceeds the total length of the father-to-be by about four centimeters. As with most gobies the male guards and cares for the eggs until they hatch about a week later.

Once they have hatched the young are usually not cared for and can immediately master *Artemia* nauplii and micro-eels. Raising them is equally straightforward; about half a year later they have fully developed and then are an asset for community



Mogurnda cf. cingulata "Dekai"

tanks, too. Their calm, peaceful nature and their beautiful coloration will definitely make sure that this species won't disappear from our aquariums in the near future.

***Mogurnda cf. cingulata* "Dekai"**

Considering its color range *Mogurnda cf. cingulata* "Dekai" nearly is a large edition of the peacock goby – but definitely less socially compatible! This variant was brought to Europe by Johannes Graf, I keep them since the 2013 IRG congress in Leipzig. The fish grow up to twelve, occasionally to fifteen centimeters and have a typical "*Mogurnda*-mouth." It is lots of fun for my children to cast a cube of frozen food into the tank and to observe

how the fishes gobble it up. Small fishes below five centimeters have only a limited lifespan when these sleeper gobies are around! However, this does not mean that you should abstain from any companions at all, all the more because *Mogurnda* are true characters. Within a species there are real "thugs," but also very friendly specimens. The way they are kept also plays a large role.

I'll only briefly describe the general rules for their care, because they are only of minor importance. The usual water characteristics and temperatures are acceptable and they eat anything that fits in their mouth. Aquariums have to be suitably large; everything below one meter is by definition a "nano tank" in the eyes of a *Mogurnda*.



Mogurnda cf. cingulata "Dekai"; male over its eggs.

They are not very active swimmers; mostly they stand in the water diagonally and therefore offer a nice contrast to hectic rainbowfish. You can often read that the sexes are easy to determine from the longer dorsal and anal fins as well as by their bulging forehead profile. I used to think so, too, and obtained a pair of *M. adspersa* from a fish store some time ago. I selected the animals – just like a pro – by the criteria above and set them to breed.

I was amazed when the male started to lay eggs... Those criteria can be correct, but don't have to be! You can only be sure from the genital papilla, which is clearly wider and blunt on the female and thin and pointed on the male. *Mogurnda* are open substrate spawners; they readily ac-

cept larger flat stones, but in need the aquarium glass will do. The young hatch after about seven days being guarded by the father and usually immediately can master *Artemia* nauplii, only rarely you need to help them through the first days with micro eels or *Paramecium*.

Something for the community tank?

I will treat keeping them in a community tank and my observations on them more extensively. In advance: These are my observations; other keepers may have had different experiences!

Both F2-couples that I acquired in Leipzig first moved into a quarantine tank, where they could feed for the first few weeks among other things on

malformed and otherwise discarded fish. The then about seven centimeter long *Mogurnda* cf. *cingulata* “Dekai” ate fish up to a total length of four centimeters! Whoops! I started to rethink my intentions to keep them in a community tank. Finally they still moved to a two-meter community tank, where they met several larger, but still not fully grown rainbowfish species. That worked wonderfully well! Both pairs were concentrated on each other and competed for the best places in the tank to the extent that they never had any time to look at the other fish. Additionally, the aquarium was densely planted and richly structured, so it offered many possible territorial boundaries. I really think that – if the aquarium is large enough – two or more pairs of *Mogurnda* are easier to keep with other fish than a single pair.

After a few weeks one of the pairs had established themselves and from then on they spawned about every fourteen days. It was very interesting that they switched back and forth every time between two different but fixed spawning sites, they never spawned on the same stone twice in a row. It did not take long before I could discover the first young. They were not cared for by the parents, probably they were even too small to be seen as food. I was very

surprised to see that the young who escaped the mouths of the rainbowfish kept company with their parents. Some of them stayed close to the parent couple for multiple weeks and moved back and forth with them between the spawning sites. Other keepers of *Mogurnda* have made similar observations. Whether you can already call this a “higher” form of parental care, more than just caring for the eggs, is an open question. But at least the young from earlier spawnings were allowed to stay close and therefore indirectly benefited from the protection of the parents.

They vehemently defend a territory of about twenty-five-centimeter radius around the spawning site against all other tank inhabitants. By the way, the lesser pair never spawned during all this time!

The four original *Mogurnda* specimens therefore were relatively suitable for keeping in a community under these conditions. They did nip fins, as to be expected especially when they were spawning, but never seriously harmed other inhabitants. Even when a school of fully-grown *Pseudomugil furcatus* – in size a potential prey – moved in, everything remained fine.

This changed when both original pairs were passed to another IRG member and replaced by six young off-



T. ocellicauda with spawn.

spring, which were raised in this tank. Have in mind: Neither the layout nor the other inhabitants changed. These six specimens really showed their bad reputation and attacked the blue eyes, which were the same size, to the point that I had to remove the gobies. At first I thought that they would behave better once they had “calmed down” and extensively examined and “tested” their housemates. Nope! These six animals remained just as aggressive, even when they were kept under other circumstances, so in the end I gave them to a friend in my aquarium society, who could keep them together with a smaller species of snakehead. Predator fish amongst themselves!

In the meantime I had, within my breeding room, inadvertently “misplaced” two young *Mogurnda* cf. *cingulata* “De-kai” of about one centimeter each, to two different aquariums, which already contained semi-adult rainbowfish.

Against all expectations they grew up in there until I could again move them to my two-meter tank. And both fishes turned out to be exceptionally peaceful! If you overlook their hunts for newly hatched red-spotted gobies, which also lived in the aquarium, they did not nip even one fin or bend one scale. By now both animals

have grown to over eight centimeters, and it happens to be a definite pair too, which however – also somewhat remarkable – has not spawned until now.

What does this teach us? Gobies and especially specimens of the genus *Mogurnda* are definitely characters, with strong individual differences. Just because of these exciting observations I recommend them to everyone who has aquariums of suitable size!

THE AUTHOR



Gunnar Loibl, born 1970, from Weiden (Bavaria) got infected with the rainbowfish virus ten years ago. His interests also extend to gobies, especially those species that migrated from the Pontic-Caspian region into the Bavarian Danube.

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Titelbild:
Junge Zwergwüstengrundel *Chlamydogobius ranunculus* in der 1. Etage des „Unterwasser-Blätterhotels“.
Foto: Peter Warth

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