

Jack Dempsey

Cichlosoma octofasciatum

Order: Perciformes

Family: Cichlidae

Description: The Jack Dempsey is a very aggressive cichlid found in many colors depending on age and mood, and ranging from a light yellowish-tan with turquoise speckles to a dark brown-blackish color with blue spots. All Dempsey have a thin reddish line along the top edge of their dorsal fin, which is more prominent in males than in females. Young fish are lightly colored with two golden spots along each side and dark stripes along the body. Males are normally larger and more brightly colored than females.

Special Features:

- **Feeding** – Jack Dempsey are omnivorous
- **Complex Breeding Behaviors** - Eggs are usually laid on the bottom by the female, and then the male will fan them with their fins in order to increase the flow of oxygen. When the eggs hatch, one of the adults nearly always remains to defend the young for the first weeks.
- **Size** – They grow to approximately 8-10 inches.

Similar Species: Similar species include the Rio Grande cichlid, *Cichlasoma cyanoguttatum*, the Convict cichlid, *Cichlasoma nigrofasciatum* and the Mayan cichlid, *Cichlasoma urophthalmus*.

Range and Habitat: Jack Dempsey are native to the Atlantic slope of Central America, from Rio Chachalacas and Rio Paso San Juan, Mexico, to Rio Ulua, Honduras. Jack Dempsey are established along the Gulf of Mexico only in Florida, where they

remain uncommon. The established populations probably represent several independent introductions. Jack Dempsey are frequently found in canals with mud and sand bottoms and drainage ditches rich in aquatic vegetation.

Reproduction: Jack Dempsey are substrate spawners. Both males and females are extremely aggressive toward other fish when guarding the clutch and eventually the fry. Approximately 500-800 eggs are spawned per clutch.

Notes:

- **Introduction** - They were introduced through intentional or accidental releases from fish farms and recreational aquaria. The established populations probably represent several independent introductions.
- **Potential Impacts** - Given their limited range and population size, Jack Dempsey do not presently constitute a serious threat to the Gulf of Mexico ecosystem. It is uncertain whether the established populations will persist.
- **Limitations** - As is the case with other cichlids, Jack Dempsey are very resourceful. They are omnivorous and can be found in a great variety of habitats. In addition, they can tolerate relatively cold waters and very low oxygen concentrations.