

Cichlids



We look like...

We vary greatly in shape, size and color depending on what species we are. To start, some features that all of us have in common are that we have muscles in our throats that act as a second set of jaws, and we have one nostril on each side of our head instead of two. Here at EarthWorks there are four species of cichlids: the Black Belt Cichlid, the Convict Cichlid, the Green Terror Cichlid and the Jack Dempsey Cichlid. Cichlids species like the Jack Dempsey and the Convict are aggressive toward other fish. All of us at EarthWorks are all close in size, so we tend to get along well. All four species vary in shape and color, but some common colors are black, white, dark blue, and gray with many colored patterns. The patterns and markings on our scales make us easy to identify.

For example, a Black Belt Cichlid like me has one black stripe down the middle of white scales on my body.





I am a Convict Cichlid. I have stripes of dark blue or black on a gray or white body.

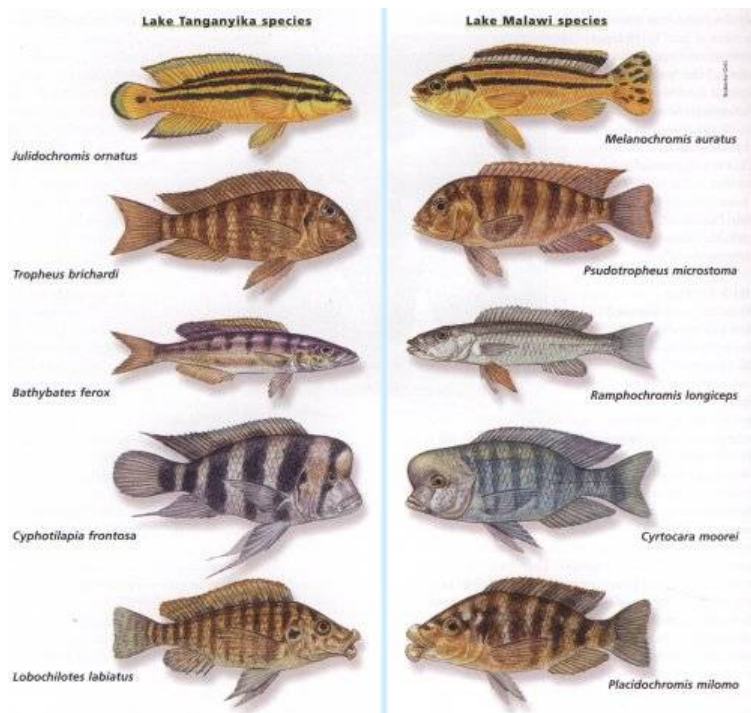
I am a Green Terror Cichlid. I have a dark gray or black body with green patterns on my scales.



Finally a Jack Dempsey Cichlid, like me, has a brown base color with blue or green dots on my scales.

Our habitat is...

We are freshwater fish so we like to live in lakes and ponds that have lots of plant life. We come from all over the world, like Africa and South America. There are even some lakes that are famous for all the cichlid species they have, like Lake Malawi in Africa (pictured here). Smaller cichlids like to



make their homes in rocks, so we can hide somewhere if predators are around.

We eat...

Most cichlids, like us, are herbivores, so we only eat plants. We eat algae and other aquatic plants. There are species of cichlids that are predatory, and eat other smaller fish. There are even species that eat animal droppings for food! Scientists think that the reason there are so many species of cichlids is because each species has a wide range of food sources.

Some interesting things about us are...

- Scientists think there are 1,300 to 1,900 different species of us. This puts us in the top three largest families of animals with backbones!
- We are called a mouth breeding species. This means that we protect and raise our young by scooping them up into our mouths.
- In Africa, Lakes Malawi and Tanganyika are famous for the numbers of different species of us living there.
- We can be found in pet stores around the world. Many of us are among the most common types of aquarium fish to own.
- Aggressive cichlids tend to bully or eat fish that are smaller than they are. That is why the EarthWorks we are all around the same size, so we won't eat one another.