

Ornamental Fish Farming

Spawning facility: glass tank: 600 x 300 x 300 mm (24 x 12 x 12 in). As with *kribensis*, this size of tank can be used for groups or be divided into two or even three sections, holding one pair per section.

Water: they are more sensitive to water chemistry and quality than most cichlids, and prefer water which is soft, and neutral to slightly acid. Water of around 50 ppm total hardness, with a pH of 6.5 to 7.5 should be well accepted for breeding. They will reproduce in harder, slightly more alkaline water, but poorer results can be expected. **Temperature:** 26° to 28°C (79° to 82°F) should be adequate, but if results are poor, temperature can be maintained at 30°C (86°F) to encourage spawning. **Aeration:** as provided by biofiltration. **Peat extract:** not essential but could be trialled if other aspects of water chemistry are less than optimal, and fish are performing poorly.

Spawn robbing: not normally a problem with this species if eggs are removed soon after spawning. Some pairs make very good parents but it is risky to depend on this. **Spawning surface:** they will readily spawn on small suitable surfaces just 50 to 60 mm square. Fragments of terracotta pottery, small flat stones or pieces of slate work well. When

these are placed on the glass bottom of an otherwise bare tank, they are almost invariably chosen for spawning on. **Tank layout:** although this species is now very domesticated and will breed in a bare tank with just a biofilter and spawn-receptacles, it remains a somewhat timid fish, and some form of refuge which they would not choose to spawn on is probably good for their well-being. Homemade plastic plants serve well for this purpose. Five or six spawning sites would be appropriate for the tank size suggested (undivided), one in each corner and one or two in the centre. (See FIG 4.45.)

Identifying the sexes: males are larger and more brightly coloured. The second rays of the males' dorsal fins are black and extended. (Those of females are also black, but not extended.) Females develop a dark pink belly when spawning-ripe. **Grouping:** groups of 3 males to 3 females or 4 to 4 in the tank size suggested, or pairs in sections of a divided tank. The species is quite un-aggressive when spawning, but spawn-receptacles used with groups should be placed well apart anyway.

If single pairs are being bred and rearing the young away from them is proving difficult, it can be worthwhile to try leaving spawns with the



FIG 4.45. A spawning tank holding 3 pairs of neon blue *ramirezis*. A homemade plastic plant has been used as a refuge. At the back, to the left of the plant, is a biological filter. 6 pieces of terracotta flower pot are spread through the tank as spawning sites.