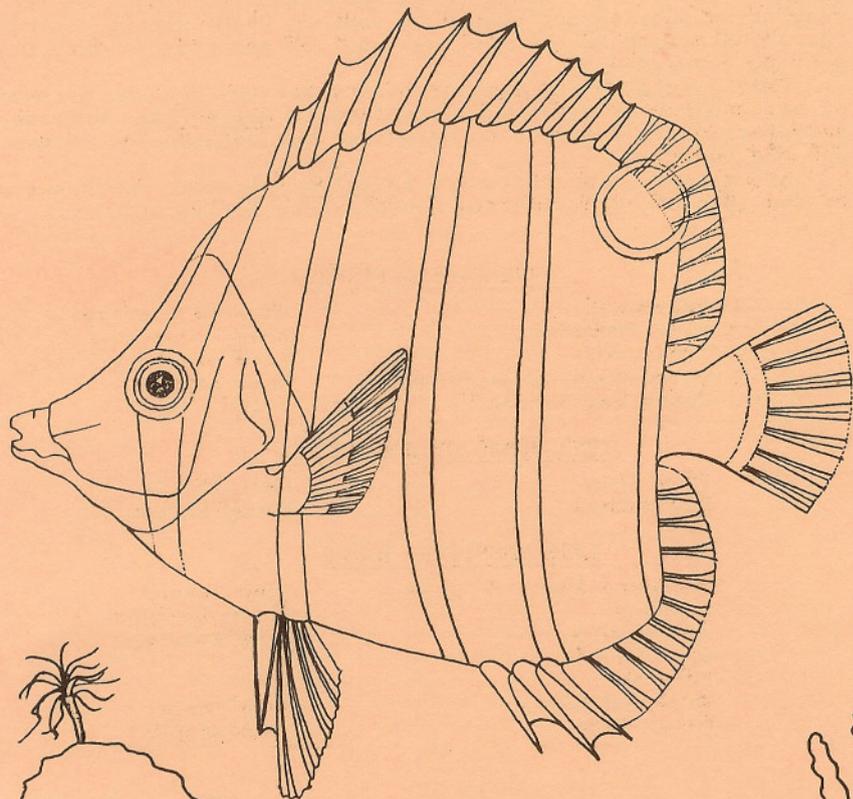


* DELTA TALE *

March/April
1993

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF

potomac valley aquarium society



The Delta Tale is published bimonthly for the benefit of the membership of the Potomac Valley Aquarium Society Inc., a non-profit educational and social organization. The society was founded in 1960 for the purposes of furthering the aquarium hobby by the dissemination of information and advice, and the promotion of good fellowship among the membership by organized activities and competitions.

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With news and updates on meetings,
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Hi Guys:

It has been several months now, but every time I look at the pictures it seems as though it was only yesterday.

We were driving to work on 495 at the big curve right before the Cathedral when I saw an animal running "hell bent for leather" on the right hand shoulder. My husband, Clancy, pulled over and I jumped out and began to run in that direction. I was going to try to chase it back off the highway and away from the traffic. By the time I got out of the car it had run across two lanes and apparently gotten hit because it was dragging its back end and pulling itself in circles with its front legs. Miraculously cars were swerving around and in some cases directly over but so far no one else had hit it. I was crying so hard I could hardly see where I was going because I just knew I was going to see it get squashed in a second. Suddenly someone streaked past me like a locomotive. It was Clancy! I knew he was a fast runner, but I have never seen anything like that. He shot over into the second lane and scooped up the animal with a towel and was back on the shoulder before another car came around the curve! What a hero!

The animal was a ground hog. I have always heard that they can be very vicious. Clancy said that he didn't think that her back was broken because she was gently pushing at his waist with her back feet as we walked to the car. A big hunk of fur and skin had been pulled from her back. She began to struggle a little more and I reached over to touch her head and as soon as I did she looked over at me and stopped struggling.

We took her back to the shop and put her in a box in the fish room. I named her Beltway. The first evening we saw blood in her urine, but she was eating and wetting and the rest so we figured she wasn't as bad as we feared.

After the first day I gave her the run of the fish room, but after she checked everything out, she mostly just slept. If she was sleeping on her back I could go in and pet her little tummy and she would just open one eye and look at me. I was afraid that such sweetness on her part had to be because she was dying. I even called a rehabilitator and he told me that they bite something awful, but she never did and never even looked like she was thinking about it.

When we first examined her we noticed that her front teeth were very brown and she felt stiff or hard. It was like petting a fur covered rock, but as the days passed her teeth got clean and she relaxed. I guess anyone would feel a little tense after being hit by a car.

(cont. pg. 14)

I'm back. For those of you, probably most, that didn't even realize I was gone- I recently spent two weeks traveling almost the entire length of Mexico doing research on wild Goodeids, and their habitats. The trip involved a joint team of Mexicans and Americans and we all learned a lot from each other as well as what we found out in the field. Mexico is a wonderful place to visit. Forget anything negative you've heard about it. The people were all very friendly and helpful. Most would have probably given you the shirt off their back if you needed it. The Mexican economy appears to be booming. There were signs of growth and prosperity almost everywhere we went from big cities to the tiniest town.

I wouldn't be surprised, the way things are going, to soon see people trying to sneak across the border to get into Mexico. To answer the burning question on everyone's minds, "did you get sick?" - Yes I did. During our two week tour we traveled all over Mexico, through some towns small enough to throw a rock from one end to the other, ate in places with chickens running around under the table,.. and I got sick; from a hotdog I ate for lunch in the Tucson airport while waiting for the other two Americans on our team to arrive.

I won't go into any more detail right now. I'll be writing a detailed article sometime in the future and most likely giving a program at one of our monthly meetings too. Watch for details.

I didn't make it to the last monthly meeting but Beverle tells me the new sound system on our video projector works great. If you haven't been at one of the meetings where we've used this- we now have a projector that lets us project video tapes onto a movie screen. This will open up a whole new realm of stuff for us to use for our monthly programs. How about "Americas Fishiest Home Videos"?

Our newest addition to PVAS is the PVAS Hotline. Simply call (703) 352-3365 for the latest information on PVAS activities and related items of interest. The recording will give you up to the minute information on meetings such as times, place, program topics, cancelations, etc. You can also find out about auctions and other PVAS special events. Give it a call. Find out what's happening.

Until next time...

Buenos dias

Juan

New Feature!!
PVAS Hotline: 703-352-3365
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FROM THE
EDITORZ DESK!



WHAT'S HAPPENING

For the latest information on "what's happening" try the new PVAS Hotline. Call (703) 352-3365 anytime.

March 8: PVAS Monthly Meeting. Program, raffles, door prize, bowl show (categories: dwarf cichlids & open), refreshments and more. Always lots going on. Everyone is welcome, even if you once hired an illegal alien.

April 12: PVAS Monthly Meeting. Same good stuff as usual happening. Bowl show categories- barbs & open.

April 30- May 2: American Livebearer Association Convention. Airport Ramada Inn, Pittsburgh, PA. For more info contact Rich Serva/Gina Tash, 5407 S. Celeste View Dr., Stow, OH 44224, or John Mangan.

Also coming in May- the PVAS Spring Auction. Complete details in the next issue of Delta Tale. Info will also be on the hotline soon.



PVAS members may advertise in the Trading Post at no charge. Deadline for the next issue is March 10. Send ads to Delta Tale c/o John Mangan, 9770 Oleander Ave, Vienna VA 22181.

NATURAL AQUATIC ENVIRONMENTS

by George White, PVAS

Now is a fine time to plan your yard and garden. Taking care of the yard can be one of life's biggest pleasures--if you know how to go about it properly. And, you can make your spouse very happy. The grass, trees, and shrubs are the least important. What counts are the fish! A carefully planned yard decorating scheme can include several mini-ponds or tastefully laid-out barrels or other containers for cultivating fish. (Incidentally, such a decorator arrangement provides excellent cover for secretly cultivating live fish foods such as the mosquito larva suggested by Mr. Anonymous in an excellent, well conceived Delta Tale article about a year ago. The gist of his article was that if you let a body of water stand undisturbed, the mother mosquitoes will find it and lay eggs for you. You net larva out to feed your fish whenever you please. The mosquitoes will be happy, your fish will be happy and you will be happy. (Any mosquito larva who mature and become accidental escapees are not a problem--they are potential future mothers.)

The key to all of this is careful planning to avoid making your yard look cluttered. (And, if there are small children nearby, be sure it is safe.) A number of inexpensive items available at hardware and gardening supply stores can be used to create lovely "ponds" or a series of ponds. Flowers and other decorative plants placed around the water containers add a touch of class.

There are many things you can convert into "ponds" with a little imagination. For examples, four sets of items that can be used in decorating your yard are:

1. You can order a fancy and interestingly shaped pond, a reliable pond pump(s) and filter(s) from one of the local aquarium shops. This can be the centerpiece of your fine yard decorative layout. A local aquarium shop can also provide you with excellent advice on managing a pond. And, someone might suggest a clever idea that will really add to your enjoyment of your pond or help to make it a masterpiece of landscaping. This aquarium club bulletin often publishes the names of local shops that cooperate with us on club shows and other events. One of these stores would be a good place to start.

2. Sawed-off wooden whiskey barrels can provide imaginative and lovely mini-habitats. Gardening shops and special garden supply catalogs sometimes offer these barrels at attractive prices. Unless the fish you might keep in them like acidic water (and a touch of whiskey?), the barrels should be lined with heavy duty garden trash bags or a commercial pond liner like the ones from Tetra.

Lining the wooden barrel with a plastic pond liner (available from an aquarium store) or a heavy duty trash bag is easy. First, put the bag or liner in the barrel, then fill it about halfway with water. Wrap the edges of the bag over the side of the barrel. Tie it down with a nice looking rope, preferably marine quality. If necessary, trim off the excess bag hanging down over the side of the barrel below the rope.

3. A series of small ponds can be made using cement mixing tubs, which are usually 2 x 3 or 3 x 3 feet and are available from hardware or construction supply stores. These trays come in a variety of sizes, are sturdy and are usually brown or dark green. They can be buried partially in the ground and surrounded with flat or other nice rocks.

A friend in Germany created a real masterpiece using a number of these tubs to form a cascading stream 15 feet (3 meters) long. His yard sloped slightly and he built up mounds of rock and soil to further elevate several tubs. Rocks and carefully chosen plants along the edge made his "stream" a wonderful addition to his yard. A hidden pond pump and water feeder line kept the water flowing. As you might have guessed, the fish he kept in his stream were running water species similar to American darters. But, any number of species would have flourished there.

4. If you really want to be creative and plan to keep your pond or ponds for a long time, you could consider using a commercial pond liner like the ones from Tetra. These can be shaped to fit into irregular or fancy ponds or streams you have dug into your yard. These should be lined along the edge with rocks to keep them in place.

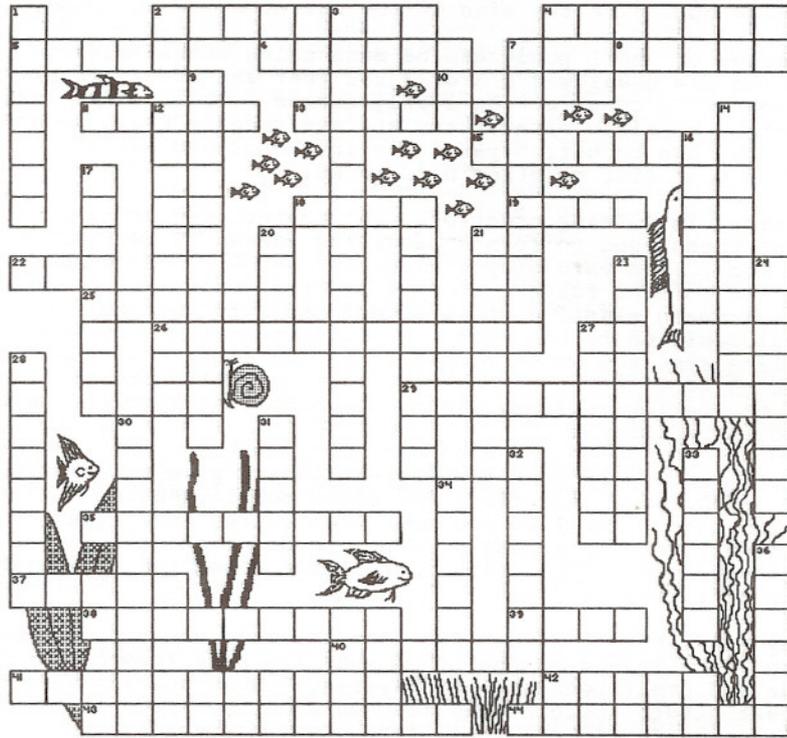
Many species of fish benefit from a summer vacation in the great outdoors (assuming that the ponds are safe from cats, raccoons and other potential piscavores.) Some species take on their best natural colors when kept outside. One adventure is to release the fry of colorful, fast growing species such as Killifish or Cichlids in the spring and bring them back inside in the fall. It can be interesting to compare them with similar age fish kept inside during the spring and summer.

A large pond may also provide adequate space for some species to display more of their natural behavioral patterns than they can in an aquarium. One interesting idea is to set up a community of highly territorial fish such as some of the small Central American Cichlids. Their political wrangling over territories and rocks can be fun to observe. (Fish are my favorite "politicians.")

In summary, these do-it-yourself outdoors streams and ponds provide excellent opportunities for creative gardening. Some very interesting plants can be obtained from aquatic garden specialists such as Lilly Ponds in Lillyponds, Maryland, or ordered through your local aquarium store. Your fish will love the natural touch. And, the lovely plants will add credibility to the stories you tell your spouse, parents, landlord, neighbors, or other interested parties about your efforts to spruce up your yard.

Somethin' Fishy's Goin' On Here!

by Diane Spencer



Across

2. Ugly plants
4. Short-lived rain puddle dwellers
5. *Astronotus ocellatus*
6. Saltwater environment
8. Small cichlids
10. A sharp fish
11. Breathing apparatus
13. Stipped danio
15. Lightly salty
18. Swimming appendages
19. Not tank raised
22. *Carassius auratus*
25. Tank purifier
26. Air Breathers
29. A shocking fish
35. Colorful livebearers
37. *Poecilia latipinna*
38. Active at night
39. Active at night
40. King of the Aquarium
41. Suckermouth catfish
42. Siamese fighting fish
43. Keeps your tropicals comfy
44. Livebearers of Mexico

Down

1. *Heros nigrofasciatus*
3. Fish keepers pride & joy
7. Wiggly fish food
9. Piscine pachyderm
12. Home of the Mbuna
14. Flat face catfish
16. Fish tank drainer
17. Microscopic live food
20. Tiger __, Cherry __, Checker
21. Calcium content
23. Some lay their eggs in peat
24. Angelfish family
27. Aerator
28. Fish Tank
30. Tank comic
31. Another colorful livebearer
32. _____ nana (plant)
33. Accurate, spitting fish
34. Not alkaline
36. In the family Characidae



Answers on page 16. No cheating. We're watching you.

Capt. Sven Down
Crossword Puzzle Police

A Summer on a Jungle River

(Part 1)

Alex H. Townsend, PVAS

In the summer of 1971 I had the good fortune to spend approximately two months working in the interior of the island of Samar in the central Philippines. Our party of a half dozen or so archaeologists traveled via "pump-boat" (an outrigger canoe powered by the equivalent of a lawnmower engine) several hours and about 30 kilometers up Samar's Basey River (pronounced Bahsay), after crossing a narrow open strait from the island of Leyte. For much of the trip, there was little to see except other canoes and a seemingly endless horizon of nipa palm that lined both sides of the lower course of the river. But eventually we arrived at our destination -- a rugged escarpment of eroded limestone overlaid with a lush tropical rainforest. Typical of limestone formations, the region was dotted with caves and natural rock shelters. The area was so noted for its natural beauty, in fact, that it had been designated by the Philippine government as a National Park.

Our objective was the excavation of two large caves located beside the river, as well as the surveying and charting of some of the many smaller caves (many of which had been used as natural burial chambers by earlier inhabitants) whose openings could be seen in the cliffs above the river. From an archaeological perspective, our discoveries that summer were exciting. I remember especially crawling through narrow caves and the strange mixture of feelings upon discovering human skulls, their orbits peering through the soft white mantle of limestone that had slowly enveloped them over the centuries. But what has stayed with me from that adventure, much more so than the ancient stone tools, shards, and skulls, are still vivid memories of life on (and near) the river. This was a largely uninhabited and hence unspoiled area much richer in flora and fauna (and more rewarding for the observer) than any zoo or aquarium could hope to be.

What follows is obviously not a typical article about tropical fishes, or even about collecting fishes. Rather, I've tried to put on paper my most vivid recollections (a series of vignettes, really) of that summer on the river, some relating to fishes and aquatic life and some not, with the simple goal of providing some flavor or perhaps even a better appreciation for life in a tropical habitat. It would be difficult to say to what degree my experiences on Samar raised my appreciation of tropical fish, but I feel certain that my long fascination with fishes made me much more observant and appreciative of what I experienced that summer.

The Setting

Fortunately, one member of our group had done prior work in the area and had supervised the construction of a small cabin beside the river. We were thus able to live in what might be

termed "jungle luxury," though the absence of all toilet and bathing facilities served as a constant reminder that we were truly "in the bush" (or, as the occasion demanded, in the river). Our cabin sat near the mouth of a limestone gorge, about twentyfive feet above the river on a small promontory which itself was dwarfed by the towering limestone cliffs which flanked the river. Panhologan Cave, which gave the immediate locality its name and which was one of the targets for excavation, was at the base of the cliff to which the promontory was connected.

The river, which was quite narrow from this point into the interior of the island, was the only means of travel through the area. The terrain was incredibly rugged, so rugged that I doubt any of us were able to venture more than a hundred yards from the river during our stay. Underfoot was heavily eroded limestone, often in jagged formations, while on all sides and overhead was the rainforest with its incredible variety of vegetation.

Panhologan certainly was not lacking in its variety of wildlife. Dawn and dusk were marked by flights of large hornbill-type birds and troops of noisy macaques occasionally passed through the tree canopy overhead. And there were smaller but no less interesting creatures if one took the trouble to seek them out. Small flying lizards, for example, could occasionally be found gliding with practiced precision from tree to tree, their skin stretched like a kite in a breeze and making a soft whirring sound before they struck their target with a slight "smack." In the water adjacent to the cabin were small schools of what appeared to be plain little Ciprinid-like fishes and, in what proved a nice discovery for an amateur aquarist, small numbers of Archer Fish. If one watched patiently, wherever the brush overhung the river just above the water's surface, eventually a small squirt of water (followed by the splash of the successful archer gulping its prey) would betray the presence of these fish.

And then there was the humidity. Through most of the days and all of the nights, humidity was at or very near total saturation. A light shirt damp with the day's perspiration and hung in an open window overnight, for example, was no dryer the next morning than when taken off the previous day. It was only in the middle of the sunniest days that clothing could be washed in the river and hung to dry. Every weekend witnessed the ritual of swabbing all leather belongings (belts, camera cases, shoes, etc.) with alcohol to remove the green mold that invariably took hold during the week. I recall that we counted amongst our most treasured possessions a handful of perforated metal canisters of silica jel which were dried in a wood-fired stove each weekend as part of our anti-humidity ritual (these were invaluable for keeping cameras and other instruments in working order):

Iguanas

One animal we encountered periodically, especially in the vicinity of our cabin, was a type of large grayish-green iguana.

This is not, I should point out, a creature I regard with any real affection. I mean, these guys are downright ugly (the expression "a face only a mother could love" comes to mind). But what I did gain in the course of the summer was an admiration for the iguana as an animal ideally adapted to a jungle environment.

At first I found the iguanas to be something of a curiosity. Occasionally seen at a distance, they usually were spotted as they lay basking in the sun -- sometimes on large rocks along the riverbank, sometimes on tree branches overhanging the water. And, of course, the moment they saw us, they were gone. Actually, I think it was the way in which they fled from our approach that made me realize how remarkably well adapted these animals are. Often, for example, when an individual animal was startled by one of our party, it would scurry to the water and, with a violent thrashing of its large tail and its feet nearly a blur, go skittering across the surface of the river to the opposite shore. These loud and splashy escapes were comical, though effective. But one Sunday afternoon, I saw a much more graceful and impressive side to the iguana.

Sunday was our one day off during the week. It was also the one day that our Philippine assistants (and their canoes) were absent. But these days were ideal for exploring the area around the cabin. During one of these little explorations I was walking quietly along the riverbank beneath a steep embankment about seven feet high. My attention, as usual, was on the water -- I was normally on the lookout for any fishes that might be lurking in the shadows of the large half-submerged rocks along the shore -- and I didn't see the large iguana basking near the edge of the embankment above me. Startled by a sudden rustling in the vegetation overhead, I looked up just in time to see, at no more than arms' length, a large iguana (the largest I saw all summer) sailing from the top of the embankment on my left to the river on my right. No competition diver could have executed a dive with greater precision and more perfect form. So rigid was its body and tail, with feet folded flat against its sides that, despite its speed, it seemed momentarily frozen in mid-air. It made hardly a splash when it hit the water, so perfect was its entry, and its underwater escape (propelled by the graceful undulation of its large tail) was obscured by surface reflections and large rocks. The entire encounter was over in a couple of seconds, but after twenty years I can still picture that iguana, not just frozen in mid-air, but frozen in time as well. Here was an animal at home in trees and on the ground, and which could run across the water or dive and swim -- how could an animal be better adapted to the jungle?

Under the Bridge

Upstream from our cabin, on a tributary of the Basey, was a large natural limestone bridge. The tributary widened where it flowed beneath the bridge, forming a deep and seemingly still pool perhaps one hundred feet across. Much of our time that

summer was spent excavating and mapping a large L-shaped cave, named "Sohoton Cave," with its rear (and smaller) opening located immediately beneath one end of the bridge and about fifty feet above the pool below. (Access to the cave was via a short trail through the forest to a much larger and better lit opening.)

On sunny days it was tempting to steal a few minutes after lunch to walk beside and explore the pool and the upstream banks of the river. I remember especially one of these walks because of two "discoveries." At a point just upstream from the bridge and the pool, I was walking along the narrow sandy riverbank when a bright flash in the shallow water caught my eye. Moving closer, I saw a tight school of very tiny fishes, each no longer than an inch, making its way slowly along the edge of the stream toward the pool. What captured my interest was the coloring of these fish -- each time the school turned, it reflected the sun's rays with a burst of bright gold. I wasn't able to get a good look at the individual fish and, to this day, have no idea what they were. Still, I can just imagine a small school of those fish in one of my aquariums, though artificial light probably would not do justice to their coloring.

After the school of tiny golden fish disappeared into the deeper waters of the pool, I was about to take the trail back up to the cave when I noticed something under the bridge. I happened to be looking at a large insect, probably a dragonfly, as it skimmed just above the water beneath the bridge when a bird about the size of a mockingbird (but much more agile) darted out of nowhere and, with an audible "snap," snatched the insect in mid-flight. Within seconds, another large insect followed in the path of the first -- and, despite a last-second desperate effort to escape, met the same abrupt fate. Then I realized that about a dozen of these birds were perched on narrow ledges on either side of the pool in the shadow of the bridge, each waiting its turn to dive out of the shadows and snap up an unwitting lunch. There was no shortage of insects of course, and they appeared regularly at about thirty second intervals, all following the same deadly flight path.

Once past my morbid fascination with the efficiency of the birds' hunting skills, I began to wonder by what measure of orchestration the birds decided who amongst them would be the next to feed. At no point during my observations did I see more than one bird at a time leave its ledge in pursuit. Nor did the birds appear to alternate their attacks from the two opposing sides of the pool. I was never able to predict (other than with a lucky guess) to which of the birds the next hapless insect belonged, even though I witnessed this feeding behavior several times during the summer. The birds simply seemed to understand there were plenty of insects for all, and each got its turn.

to be continued next issue

At the end of a week we felt that she was well enough to release. We scouted various areas - we couldn't put her back where we had found her now could we? Finally we decided on a big field off 108. It was raining - as it had been for the last week - and we really felt kind of bad taking her to a strange place in the rain, but I was afraid that it was too hot in the fish room and I didn't want her to get too trusting of humans. I picked her up out of the box and we took a few pictures with a borrowed Polaroid. I set her on the ground and she just sat there looking up at us. Then she walked over and leaned against Clancy's leg. He tried to scare her and stomped his feet so she came and sat by my leg. I leaned down like I was going to pick her up again and she walked a little ways off. She tolerated being picked up but was never very keen on it, so that seemed like a good way to get her started. We began slowly walking away - watching to make sure that she didn't look like she might be following. She just sat and looked at us as we got in the car and left.

It continued to rain for another week and all we could think of was that little creature looking up at us with beads of water all over her fur and a question in her eyes. Finally, Clancy couldn't stand it any longer. While I cooked dinner on Sunday afternoon he drove back to the place. There were a few widely spaced, new houses around and there was a man cutting the grass in the one that butted up to the field. He was very curious about Clancy walking in the field and introduced himself and cautiously asked Clancy what he was doing. When Clancy told him about Beltway he got all excited. He said that he loved groundhogs and had two that he knew of living in his yard. He put food out for them and was sure that he had seen a third unfamiliar one in the last couple of days. He had his Mom come out and get introduced and told Clancy that any time he wanted he could come and visit.

We can relax now and know that we did the best we could for her and that she is in about the best place possible. We will always wonder how she got up on the beltway in the first place and why she seemed to be in such poor condition. Most of all, though, I will remember what a precious and gentle creature she was. It was as if she understood that we had risked our lives to save hers and was truly grateful.

Later Dudes...

ed. note- don't ask me what this has to do with fish, but it's Beverle's column and she can write whatever she wants as far as I'm concerned. (Don't tell Beverle, but the only reason I said that was to make up for losing the first copy of it that she gave to me.)

J.M.

Water Hardness

by Julie Metz, E.I.A.A.

Many times I have read articles about fish where water hardness is mentioned in terms ppm, parts per million, or DH which are terms for calcium carbonate hardness.

PPM is more often used in the United States where DH is the German measure. There are also English (Clark) and French equivalents but we will not get into those. I will mention that they do vary from the former.

What I'm simply going to do is provide a chart giving you an approximate range so you can convert numbers to soft and hard terms, which was and hardly ever is mentioned in fish articles. Until I sat down and did this, it always made me a little crazy trying to figure out my tanks and my water.

To do the reverse in the conversion you can simply divide the numbers. After doing the mathematics you should round off your numbers.

Very Soft	0-10 PPM 0-0.6 DH
Soft	20-100 PPM 0.6-6 DH
Hard	100-200 PPM 6 DH-12 DH
Very Hard	over 200 PPM over 12 DH

The formula's you can use are:

German to U.S.
 $DH \times 17.848$

British to U.S.
 $Clark \times 14.254$

*Reprinted from Heart of America Aquarium Society News,
February 1990*



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Gaithersburg, MD 20877
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Meetings are held at the John J. Wood Facility, Room 7, 3730 Old Lee Highway (Rt 237),
Fairfax City, VA. Doors open at 7:30, and the meeting starts at 8PM. ALL ARE
WELCOME!

