

# THE DELTA TALE

Potomac Valley Aquarium Society Official Publication

Volume 35, Number 1



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*The Delta Tale* is published quarterly 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 purpose of furthering the aquarium hobby through the dissemination of information and advice, and the promotion of good fellowship among the membership by organized activities and competitions.

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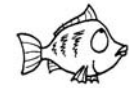
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Cover photo: 2008 AACC fish show. By Paul Lord

# SPRING 2009

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Water Lilies in Sherry Mitchell's pond.

## Editor's Tank

Let me introduce myself. I am Paul Lord. I started keeping fish in 2002 and I joined PVAS in 2007. I was living in a rented house in 2002, and the lease forbade dogs and cats. My older brother, whose home, with his wife and 3 kids, is a menagerie, (at the time: a 75 gallon community tank, 3 dogs, a cat, and a 3-foot iguana named "Megabyte") suggested that I start a fish tank. Actually, what he suggested was that I take their tank home with me – they were too busy to give it the proper maintenance. I declined the offer, mostly because the idea of transporting a large tank and live fish from Dallas back to the DC area did not appeal. So I bought a 29 gallon tank shortly after returning home from that vacation. By the time I moved to a home where I could house a dog, the fish were no longer a substitute – I wanted both. My dog, Roxy, is napping next to me as I write this, and I can hear the dribble of water from the two nearest of my 8 tanks.

This is the first edition of The Delta Tale in about 5 years. I volunteered to take the lead in starting it up again, but I can't keep it going without your help. I need articles, article ideas, and photos of PVAS events. I would love to have volunteers willing to write a regular column, but even a short update of what

you are doing (or planning to do) in your fishroom would be helpful.



The editor's loaches, clowning.

In this issue, we have an update on the work and plans for the year by the various committees from PVAS President Sherry Mitchell. We have a calendar of PVAS events in the next 3 months. We also have an interview of Sherry Mitchell by her husband Jeff Mitchell.

We have the first of a monthly column by Frank Cowherd, entitled "Tips for Your Fishroom". Frank gave an amazing talk on culturing food at the February meeting, and his daphnia command premium prices at our monthly mini-auctions. This first column is part one of a two-part article on raising livebearers – this half is, "Save Those Babies!" Next we have another

article from the inexhaustible Sherry Mitchell – a report on the donation of tanks, goody-bags, and free junior memberships that PVAS made to Our Neighbor’s Child last fall – members generously raised over \$250.

For several days I have been looking over a nearly-finished Delta Tale, nit-picking things like punctuation and line spacing. All the while, I was really stalling because it felt like it needed something more to call it “done”. I have a tendency to start projects and never finish them, so initially I thought this was my usual self-destructive tendency to drag out the last few steps of a project. The more I thought about it, the more I realized it truly was not finished. So I added “The End of the Tale”, to be a regular column. This edition is a musing on spring, getting things started both indoors and out, and (of course) fish.

Finally, we have a comic drawn by a local artist, Steve Del’aria, who has generously agreed to draw one for each issue.

Starting with the summer issue, (which should be out in late May) I will be choosing a “tank of the season”. Nominate yourselves or your friends! Email me photos of your show tanks or ponds with a brief description, and I will choose one to be featured in The Delta Tale. I will interview you about the tank,

how you got into the hobby, and other interesting tanks, livestock, or anything else interesting. (The interview can be in-person in your fish room, on the phone or via email – I’m not picky.) We’ll include the photo of your tank, close-ups of some of its residents, and (if you’re willing) a photo of you. I would like to have submissions by May 1 for the summer issue, but I’m not going to toss any out – they’ll just get filed for the next issue, so send me a photo when you have time. I can’t wait to see those amazing tanks!

Until next time, happy fishkeeping!



### Committee Updates

**TAKE THIS JOB AND LOVE IT!  
We Can’t Do What We Do Without  
You!**

By Sherry Mitchell

PVAS committees take care of everything from the coffee provided at monthly meetings to planning and executing major events like Aquafest and the Catfish Convention. Serving on a club committee is a great way to meet members and have fun. If you are interested in serving on a committee, please contact the chairman through the

PVAS forum. Committees are listed at the bottom of the forum in a separate area marked, “Committees and Planning”. As an all-volunteer club, we can’t do what we do without you!

### **-- 2009 PVAS Committees --**

**50th Anniversary:** PVAS was formed in 1960 and 2010 marks our 50th anniversary. This committee will plan the year and special events surrounding the anniversary. Staffed by the largest number of members of the club, the 50th Anniversary Committee is sure to bring something special to the membership for PVAS’ golden celebration. Chairman: Gerry Hoffman.

**Auction:** The Auction Committee is in charge of monthly mini-auctions at club meetings, as well as large auctions in the spring and fall. The committee coordinates sellers and buyers, calls at the auctions, runs the software for the auction, collects funds for sales, and makes sure that funds are disbursed to the buyers. Runners during the auctions are always needed. Chairmen: Michael Barber and Mike Kaiser.

**Breeders’ Award Program:** One focus of PVAS is on friendly competition. The Breeders Award Program encourages members to breed their fish for points, with awards given out at the end of the year. The BAP has been

newly revised for 2009 and checkers are needed in all areas of the Washington metropolitan area. Chairman: J.T. Thomas.

**By-laws:** The PVAS by-laws govern our meetings and committees, and define our organizational structure. Ongoing review and evaluation of the by-laws is necessary to be sure that the by-laws are current and in compliance with the club mission. Chairman: Jerome Huff.

**Delta Tale:** *The Delta Tale* is the club journal. Quarterly issues appear electronically on the PVAS website, under the watchful eye of Paul Lord, the *Delta Tale* editor. Articles are always welcome on any aspect of the fish-keeping hobby! Chairman: Paul Lord.

**Field Trips/Open Houses:** New in 2009. Club members are grouping together this year to open their fish rooms to PVAS members. Field Trips are also in the works, with a trip to “That Fish Place” planned for the spring of 2009. Chairman: Michael Barber.



Taken on 2008 AACC field trip to National Aquarium in Baltimore.



Sherry Mitchell led the 2008 Hospitality committee in decorating and stocking the hospitality suite at the 2008 All Aquarium Catfish Convention.

**Hospitality:** Food, coffee and soft drinks are provided at every monthly meeting. Typically we have a cooler of sodas, coffee made with the club coffee maker, a cake, and appetizers like dips, wings, nachos, fruit platters and vegetables. Help is always needed to transport food and drinks, as well as set up and break down the hospitality table. The hospitality committee also runs the refreshment stand at the twice yearly auctions. Help is always needed and appreciated! Chairman: Sherry Mitchell.

**Membership:** The membership committee processes membership applications and renewals, tracks member information, puts together new member packets, and makes membership cards each year. Committee members also greet new members and do a count of participants at meetings. Chair: Emily Novotny.

**Newsletter:** A monthly informational newsletter and meeting reminder is sent out electronically every month to the members. Members of the committee gather information for the newsletter, write it up and send it out to members prior to the monthly meeting. Chairman: Shawn Carlson.

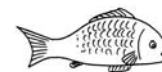
**Outreach:** This committee garners support from local businesses. It also keeps the supporting organization list up-to-date on the website with the help of the webmaster, and creates an up-to-date list of local fish stores. Outreach committee members work with local businesses to get the word out on our club, come up with charity programs that PVAS can contribute to or participate in. Outreach also acts as a liaison with the local press, notifying them of events in the club and issuing press releases. Chairman: Larry Wilkie.

**Speakers:** Speakers are the main event at our monthly meetings and a huge part of our club. The speakers committee

ensures that PVAS has monthly speakers lined up for meetings and ensures that speakers get to the meetings. Many speakers come from out of town and speaker committee members are responsible for transportation and arranging accommodations for our speakers. Chairman: Sherry Mitchell.

**Technology:** Our club is constantly changing and computerization plays a big role in that change. The technology committee is in charge of automating important systems such as the auction, breeders' award program, fish shows, membership and other databases within the club. Techies are always welcome! Chairman: Jerome Huff.

**Ways and Means:** The Ways and Means Committee is in charge of the club's raffles and door prizes for meetings. Raffles and door prizes are done at monthly meetings, twice a year large auctions, and at special events. Members of the committee perform a letter writing campaign to manufacturers and other businesses to solicit merchandise for the club to raffle and give away as door prizes. Chairman: Shawn Carlson.



## Calendar

### **March:**

#### Group Buy:

Frozen food from Doctors' Foster and Smith

#### March 9: Monthly Meeting

Shawn Carlson - Mini-Presentation on how to use the PVAS Forum

Speaker: Rick Quinteros, "Breeding the Amazonia Collection"

### **April:**

#### Group Buy:

Brine Shrimp Eggs from Brine Shrimp Direct

#### April 13: Monthly Meeting

President's Quarterly Report to the Membership

Speaker: Paul Loiselle, "Fishes of Madagascar"

#### April 18: Field trip:

*That Fish Place* in PA

#### April 26: All-day Spring Auction

### **May:**

#### Group Buy: tbd

#### May 11: Monthly Meeting:

Speaker: tbd



Sherry Mitchell and her father -- the man who started it all.

## **Meet the President of PVAS: an informal interview**

By Jeff Mitchell, PVAS Member and husband of the president  
February 14, 2009, Centreville, Virginia.  
(photos by the Mitchells)

### ***Q. How long have you been interested in fish keeping?***

It all started when my Dad brought home a 29 gallon tank. Dad grew up in Florida and he was surrounded by tropical fish farms down there. He brought the tank to our apartment and set it up in the den next to his reclining chair and the TV. We couldn't have a dog or a cat so the fish were a good compromise. I was 5 years old, and it was the mid-1960s at the height of the tropical fish hobby in America. Dad bought regular angelfish (there wasn't anything else at that time), guppies, swordtails – that sort of thing. My dad was a police officer – a very high-stress job, God rest his soul – and he tinkered with that tank all the

time. One night at midnight, he and my mom were freaking out trying to rescue the little baby guppies that had been born. The household was in an uproar over those guppies (laughter). Here was this big burly cop, netting out the smallest things I'd ever seen, worrying over those fish. That's the kind of man he was..... a good man.

### ***Q. Tell me about your first fish and aquariums.***

When I was ten, we had a little fake fiberglass waterfall in my mom's flower shop and I was always buying feeder goldfish from Woolworth's to put into it. The landlord would come in twice a year, set off an "exterminator bomb" in the store, and the fish would be floating dead the next morning. I'd make the trek around the corner to Woolworth's and get more feeder fish the next day. It's horrible, but true. It took me a while to realize that the fish weren't just dying of natural causes (laughter).

I got my first aquarium when I was 13 years old when a new fish store opened in our neighborhood. I saved up enough money for a 2.5 gallon tank, a light, plastic interior filter box and a blue betta. I kept it in my bedroom on the desk. I remember there was a metal incandescent hood on the top of that tank. It cast a really yellow light into the water, but it was really pretty at night

when all the lights were off and that blue betta was swimming around.

There were other tanks between that first one and the ones I have now. I remember one leaky tank that ruined the top of an antique sewing machine once, and there was a time when I did wildlife rehabilitation and used old tanks for baby animals and birds. I was in high school then and I was always dragging home some poor homeless, injured or orphaned creature. I even worked at a pet store in New Carrollton one summer and was in charge of 100 tanks. That was a real learning experience!



Sherry Mitchell, President of PVAS, with a bag of goldfish shipped to her by a friend.

### ***Q. What kind of fish do you keep these days?***

Oh gosh. I keep goldfish -- lots of goldfish. And guppies -- billions of guppies (laughter). I'm working on a line of half-black reds. I keep three-spot gouramis, neon swordtails, dwarf puffers, sailfin mollies, cory cats, neon

tetras, a convict cichlid, tiger Endlers', white-cloud minnows, and killifish. I like any fish that's colorful in a tank filled with plants.

### ***Q. How many tanks do you have?***

At last count, there were 21 set up, 3 more waiting to be set up, oh, and there's the one Shawn Carlson bought me in the auction last month. And the pond.

### ***Q. Tell me about the pond.***

The pond is 2000 gallons, filtered off a 100 gallon home-made horse trough filter filled with Matalla Matting. It filters 2900 gallons per hour. It's filled with aquatic plants and goldfish. You built it for me 16 years ago.

We used a fine rubber liner that had to be trucked in here on a semi. It took four strong men to haul that liner to the back yard. We lined the hole with old carpet to cushion the liner, and I even took a swim in the pond before we put fish and plants in it (laughter). All in all it took six months to finish. [She said it would only take a few weekends!] You worked hard through the summer on that thing, but it's wonderful.

### ***Q. Why such a big pond?***

Like I said, dad was from Florida and he took us to see the dolphin shows at Marine Land when I was little. I wanted a dolphin (laughter). Seriously.

Having this pond was the closest I could get to that. I absolutely love my goldfish. They bring life to the garden and the pond is the centerpiece of our landscape. I started with six feeder fish and they just bred and bred and bred, so I call that pond the “gene pool”. It’s been great to see the various color patterns that result from the comets breeding with the shubunkins. We have beautiful fish out there.



The Mitchell's pond.

***Q. What is your regular aquarium maintenance routine?***

Once a week I use the Python to pull 50 percent of the water off every tank. I also use a scrubby to go over the walls

of the tanks to keep them crystal clear. The goldfish tanks get an even larger water change because they tend to be dirty fish. Once a month all filters get rinsed or replaced. The goldfish tanks get their filter media replaced every two weeks. I like to say, “Take care of the water and the fish will take care of themselves.”

Some people would be surprised at that routine, but the fish are healthy and thriving and breeding. Well, except for the gouramis, who like a dirtier tank to do their thing. They wouldn’t breed until I just let the water sit for a month or two and added peat to the filter.

Don’t even get me started on the pond maintenance. It’s not too bad, just a water change of 1000 gallons a few times a summer. We go through a lot of water here. Ultimately, I’d like to recycle the water into the garden from the tank changes. We already do that for the pond water changes. The ferns in the garden grow HUGE from all that fish water.

***Q. How long have you been a member of PVAS?***

On and off for about three or four years. There was a break of about three years in the middle there, when I didn’t have my fish room up and running. People often cycle through phases in this hobby, and I went through a phase where

I sold every tank in the fish room and bought a dog. A couple of years later I looked around and had 6 tanks back up and running and figured I’d better rejoin PVAS. Now my dog hangs out in the fish room with me.

***Q. Fish room? Tell me about that.***

WELL, when Centreville Aquarium opened in our town, I took our 10 year old son in to see the fish and he said he’d like to have an aquarium. I didn’t encourage him at all (laughter). So we bought him an Eclipse 12 gallon tank for his birthday. It wasn’t long before he lost interest in the tank, and I moved it from his room down to our family room. Of course, tanks are like potato chips – you can’t have just one.



Sherry Mitchell bought her first tank in the early 1970's. It contained a blue betta much like this one. PVAS president Sherry Mitchell likes colorful fish in her tanks.

I started to go through a “betta phase”, and was rescuing these poor fish in dirty cups from the big corporate pet

stores. I just felt so sorry for them! You wouldn’t believe how a half-dead little betta can revive and thrive with medication and clean water. Pretty soon I had 27 bettas in bowls in my furnace room under lights that I had previously used to start seeds for the garden. I knew I needed more space and began to eyeball the little room three steps down from the furnace room. It had everything: a concrete floor, a utility sink nearby, a sump pump in case of catastrophic failure. It was perfect for a small fish room.

You came home one day and all of the old carpeting was ripped up and I was painting the concrete floor (laughter). [Interviewer sighs deeply]

The fish room, as it stands today, has racks from Ikea holding 5 gallon and 20 gallon long tanks. Ikea used to make a perfect plain wooden storage unit which is supposed to hold 2000 gallons per shelf. I bought the racks, finished them with stain and polyurethane, and bolted them to 2x4s secured to the walls. A large old dresser became a tank stand for a 75 gallon goldfish tank. Pretty soon we’ll make a tank rack [we??] for a 125 that’s sitting in the garage right now. That tank will be the centerpiece of the room. I would like for it to be fully planted with CO2 and filled with neon tetras and double-black angel fish.

Eventually I would like to add about 10 more tanks to the fish room. I think that's all I can handle (laughter). And I'd love to have another pond for the fancy goldfish [She looks coyly at the interviewer/husband and bats her eyes!].



The president's fish room, complete with comfortable viewing chair. "I like to sit in my fish room before work every morning and wake up with a cup of tea."

***Q. What are your primary goals for PVAS for this year?***

I'm so excited to be president of the club this year. We are such an active club with so many wonderful people. I'd like to see us increase membership and get more people involved in the "hands on" aspect of things. There are 15 committees and a board of directors and we always need help. Tasks range from something simple like mailing letters, to calling an auction, to running a large event like Aquafest or the Catfish Convention. I started out just baking cakes for the meetings years ago. The guys were opening bags of chips and that was "hospitality" (laughter).

As for goals, I'd like to see the Breeders Award Program take off. I'd like to see more fish in our auctions and more people actively breeding fish. I'd like to see Delta Tale completely resurrected and see people submitting things to keep that running. Our first issue in years is about to "hit the stands". I'd like the tech team to automate the auction, fish show, BAP data, and get the website moved to a faster server. They're working on all of that, by the way.

There's been talk of bringing the bowl shows back. I'd also like to see more active work with the local fish stores. Those poor guys are being hit hard in this economy and I think there's a way we can work with them. I'd also like to see our club do more outreach like what we did with the Hearst Aquarium and the "Give a Kid a Tank" initiative we did last Christmas. I'm proud of all our programs and just want them to flourish and keep going.

***Q. Where do you see the aquarium hobby headed from this point in time?***

I have a unique theory on that. Many people know that the aquarium hobby saw its heyday in the late 50's and 60's. Certainly that was the biggest time to be in the hobby, when fish were being discovered in the Amazon and throughout the world and shipping live

fish was becoming a reality. The hobby just took off then. My theory suggests that the people who enjoyed the hobby then, or took to it through osmosis like me with my dad, will soon be retiring. They'll leave active working life and then will want to return to the pursuits of their childhood. As the baby boomers age and retire, I think we'll see a renaissance of sorts in the hobby.

These will be people with some expendable funds who enjoyed the hobby as kids – people who may have had to put the hobby on hold to raise families, work and provide. Suddenly though, they'll have time for a tank, or two, or fifty (laughter). And they'll have grandkids, and their grandkids will be exposed to the hobby, and maybe the video games won't win out after all.

Maybe we'll see the hobby continue with the grandkids of the baby boomers. If grandparents involve the kids in the hobby – let them feed the fish, or help do water changes, or spend time in fish rooms, fish clubs and in fish stores then we'll influence those kids. If grandparents set up a tank for their grandkids, or start a fish club in a school for after-care programs, or install a tank in a library or other public place and involve kids in the process, then we will see the hobby continue to grow. The future lies in attracting more young people to the hobby and it will happen

among an aging, retiring population of active people who return to the hobby and influence others. Anyway, it's just my theory....



Goldfish and decorative hand-blown glass "bubbles" in the garden pond at the height of summer.

***Q. Tell me about some upcoming PVAS events that you're excited about.***

We will have a tank rack building workshop in the spring, and will have an informal trek up to That Pet Place in Pennsylvania for their annual sale. PVAS will also have an open house/fish room tour in the spring. We also initiated group buys of things like lights, brine shrimp eggs and frozen foods. All of these are new to PVAS this year.

We have the big Spring Auction on April 26th and Aquafest 2009 will be in October this year. There was a planning meeting with CCA and GWAPA for the '09 event just recently. It was a sort of meeting of "the families" (laughter). Everyone brought good ideas to the table

and we will have a wonderful event planned for the fall. I'm very excited about that. Each of the three clubs will pitch in to hold the event, and we are asking some other local clubs to come in and have fish shows. It should be terrific with speakers, demonstrations, and the big auction everyone loves in the fall.

Further out from 2009 are the PVAS 50th Anniversary Celebration in 2010, and the 2010 Catfish Convention. Both promise to be heavily attended events. Gosh, I'm tired just thinking about it (laughter). Seriously though, this club has a dynamic, active membership and I know everyone will pitch in to get the work done. These events don't just run themselves.

***Q. What is your vision for the future of PVAS?***

Gosh, I was just talking to Emily, our membership chairperson, about this the other day. I said I envisioned a rich benefactor taking us under his or her wing and giving us millions to buy our own clubhouse and establish the area's only freshwater public hobby aquarium that we could run. It would be a home base for us to have meetings and educate the public, and would have a meeting room large enough for our members, and we could have any event we wanted there. The grounds would be a garden with fish ponds full of koi and goldfish and waterlilies. And it would all be free

(laughter). Until that happens, I think doing what we are already doing and attracting active, hard working members with vision is important to the survival of the club.

People live in this hectic, hurried metropolitan area, with difficult jobs, needs for higher education, active family lives, and constant demands on their resources. In the midst of this we have PVAS, our little fish club, which is out there striving to stay active and relevant. Our survival depends upon our ability to adapt and I'm proud that we have done that. We've been at it for 50 years and I would like to be there 50 years from now, celebrating our 100th Anniversary. Who knows, if I hit the lottery someday, maybe I could be that wealthy, aging benefactor I dream about (laughter). Dad would have been so proud.



**Tips For Your Fish Room**

By Frank Cowherd (photos by author)

**SAVE THOSE BABY LIVEBEARERS  
(PART 1)  
KEEPING THEM FROM BEING EATEN**

Saving baby livebearers is something most of us plan to do from the first time we buy a pair of guppies, platys, swordtails, mollies, least killifish or

exotic livebearer. Then we wonder what to do when we first notice that the female is pregnant. In a well-planted tank with only a few adult fish some babies will survive. In fact, in any well-planted tank with only a very few fish you will eventually find a few babies of almost any species. But then, a well-planted tank with few fish is not what most of us normally have. If you are like me, you have as many fish as you can justify in the tank regardless of whether it is well planted or decorated only with rocks. Under these circumstances we never see even a glimpse of a baby, well, maybe a fleeting glimpse of one hiding in a floating plant or in a rock crevasse. But they don't last long.

So in the evolution from a fish keeper to a breeder of tropical fish, a key step is to recognize when to move the pregnant fish to someplace where the babies can be saved. If we do nothing, we get no cute little fish. And who does not want to say I raised these guppies, these mosquito fish (really), those red velvet swordtails, those xiphophorus maculatus or those anableps anableps (yes, four eyes are really livebearers).

The obvious thing to do is to take the pregnant fish out of the display tank and put her in a tank by herself. Oh, you can buy a breeder trap that can be hung inside the display tank. It has slots in it that allow the water in the main tank to circulate through the breeder trap. There

is another design that is a rectangular box with sides and bottom of fish netting. The only advantage of these breeder traps is that the water quality of the main tank is the same as in the breeder trap, and this is good for the pregnant fish and any fry she drops.

The bad part of these traps is that they are small and can cause the female much distress as can be seen if she is continually rubbing her nose against the walls. And you cannot feed the fish in this breeding trap without it quickly fouling, mainly because the female is too stressed to eat.

A better solution is to set up a five- or ten-gallon tank with abundant plants and a filter and heater to provide temperature and water quality similar to or better than the tank from which she came. Sponge filters are best. They do not suck up the babies, as can be the case with mechanical filtration like hang-on-the-back power filters or set-on-the floor canister filters. The old-style box filters that use angel-hair floss as filter medium and air bubbles to pull the water through also work well.

The amount of babies saved by such a tank depends on the disposition of the female, that is, how hungry she is, and on how many plants are provided; the more the better. Babies when first born tend to either swim as close to the



surface of the water as they can or to go to the bottom and hide in the stuff at the bottom. So the plants you provide should encompass both areas. I personally like to use an abundance of hornwort, which is a floating plant. But, if you put in enough of it at one end of the baby-saving tank, it will fill the tank from top to bottom.

Babies, particularly when first born, have a great survival instinct, likely an unconscious desire not to be eaten. Most have very quick, reflexive action to flee on being approached by any fish or object that is bigger than they are, even a shadow. And so, usually they get away. But they cannot keep up this fleeing motion for very long, definitely not continuously. They are good for a few milliseconds of escape mode, which is time enough for rapid fin and tail motion to get them to cover. But then they need to rest and maybe time to get their first bite of something to eat. Until they get that first bite they are still living off of their original egg yoke and that is gone, or mostly used up by the time they were born into whatever situation they find themselves. In your tanks, this situation depends on you.

Babies in a tank with more than a few adult fish have little chance of survival. When one adult gives chase and the fry eludes it, by chance the fry will have been chased into the view of

another adult. Disaster, as far as the fry is concerned or good fortune, as far as the adult fish sees it, can be seen as inevitable. Occasionally a fry or two survive unexpectedly in a main tank. This is survival of the fittest fry.

The separate tank with plants, filter, and heater with one pregnant fish in it seems to be the ideal solution. It is, as far as it goes. But you know that is not how we modern fish keepers do things. We find we have pregnant guppies and swordtails at the same time. This leads to two or more pregnant females in the tank meant to be the saver of babies. This still works fairly well. In this set up you can estimate that about a third of the babies born will be saved, provided you pay attention and remove the babies ASAP. Oh, so now we need another tank. Oh, and that reminds me, I have a number of used ten-gallon tanks for sale.

I have been in the fish hobby for years, and I have tried all sorts of contraptions, set-ups, and devices to save and allow growth of newly born livebearers. On the point about raising the fry to adult size, food is obviously important, but that is another story that will be covered in a separate article (Part 2).

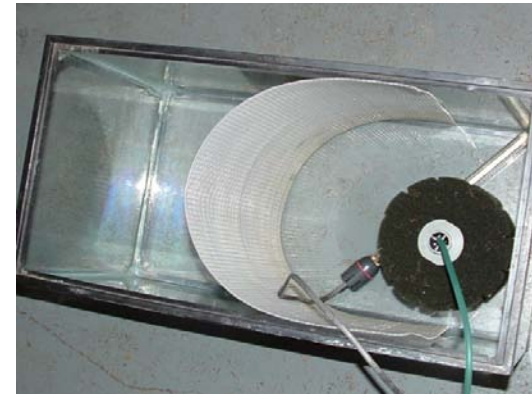


Figure 1: A ten-gallon tank with heater sponge filter and plastic canvas divider.

As far as saving babies, I found a way to have multiple pregnant females in the baby-saving tank while saving the majority of the newborn fry, not based on the counting of the number born, which I have witnessed only a couple times, but based on the actual number that survive a couple of weeks. And all of this can be done in the same tank in which they were born.

The solution I found is based on a divider made of translucent-white plastic and is sold in fabric/craft shops like Jo-Ann's for needlepoint projects. The material is sold as Darice "Artist GIANT plastic canvas" in various mesh sizes. I like the 13 1/4-inch by 22-inch in size 5 mesh. Choose a mesh of a size that your fry can swim through. To install it in your tank cut the sheet with a pair of scissors to fit the height of the tank. There is no need for clamps or devices to hold the mesh in place. Simply bend the

sheet into a U-shape (see Figure 1) and it will stay in place in a five, ten or fifteen-gallon aquarium indefinitely, held in place by the top frame of the tank and the springiness of the canvas.

I place the pregnant fish on the inner side of the U (see Figure 2). If placed on the outer side of the U, the adult fish can and will get caught in the wedge shaped spaces between the divider and the tank glass. Bummer.

I still use some hornwort in this set up (as in Figure 3), but it is not essential. It does help keep the nitrate level down by consuming nitrate. And it does help save some babies particularly if placed on the same side as the adults. And it helps the adults feel more at ease.



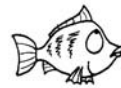
Figure 2: Multiple female red wags in a baby-saver tank.

I can put a half dozen or even more females in various stages of pregnancy into such a set up and not only save the babies but raise the babies to a size that they become too big to fit through the holes in the divider. In one current set up as described, I have fry of different sizes from at least three different females.

In previous non-divider set ups using plants only, even with tons of plants filling more than half of the space, I would get less than a third of the young fish that I get with the divider. Based solely on the numbers of babies saved and grown to a quarter of adult size, this divider method is very successful. Red wag females do not really show their pregnancy, so it is hard to know when to put them in the baby-save tank. With the tank described the female can be put in early. They often drop between 20 and 30 fry each time. Blue spotted platys tend to drop about the same number. Surprisingly I was also able to use this method to successfully get a batch of baby zebra danios without ever removing the parents.



Figure 3: Multiple female blue-spotted platys in a baby-saver tank.



## **PVAS' Give a Kid a Tank Initiative a Success**

By Sherry Mitchell (photos by author)

There I was, sitting at the Catfish Convention dinner, listening to Andrew Blumhagen talk about the hobby, while “the twins” from Canada set about throwing food at each other. It had been a crazy four days, and I was exhausted but happy that everyone had enjoyed the convention so much. At the end of his talk, Andrew paused and said, “And folks, if you want to do something for

the hobby, buy a kid a tank.” It was just a simple sentence -- a thought thrown out there at the end of his prepared speech, but for some reason those words stuck with me. Dessert was served, the twins kept our table in giggles and stitches with their antics, and soon the evening was a pleasant memory as we all began the task of packing up the convention.



Five Eclipse 3 tanks with free samples and gift certificates, ready to be wrapped.

Months later, the mission of doing hospitality for the PVAS December potluck supper loomed and I remembered Andrew’s words. It was the holiday season, and I had been thinking of how PVAS should do some kind of charity task. In past years I had worked with Our Neighbor’s Child, a local charity and had seen the miracle this organization pulled off every year when hundreds of kids got presents donated by individuals, businesses, and churches.

ONC was formed almost two decades ago to help needy families in Fairfax County. While churches and shelter organizations were set up to help with food, shelter and the basics, no resource existed for getting holiday gifts to the kids of impoverished families. ONC helped 30 kids in their first year, and quickly grew to a large all-volunteer group that helped over 1400 kids in 2006. ONC director, Kelly Lavin recently stated that close to 2000 kids would be helped this year, due to the economic crisis in our area.

So, in a nutshell, a blending of Andrew’s words and ONC’s mission came together and the “Give a Kid a Tank” initiative was born. 2008 PVAS president, Michael Barber approved the idea, and the plan was put in place. A large old-fashioned fish bowl was set up during the pot luck dinner in December with a sign asking members to give. As I sat at my table, stuffing myself with Shawn Carlson’s excellent chicken and wine sauce and Michael Barber’s ham, I watched as dozens of PVAS members stuffed the fish bowl with cash.

Originally I thought we could afford a tank or two, but at the end of the evening, PVAS members contributed over \$250! I was so proud of the generosity of our members. I remembered my first tank as a kid -- a small 2.5 gallon tank that housed a

beautiful blue betta. We lived in an apartment, so we couldn't have a dog or cat and that's how my love of fish started. I pictured kids in the same boat - living in rented housing with no pets, and hoped that one of our tanks would spur an interest in the hobby.

The day after the PVAS potluck, I headed over to see Dave at Centreville Aquarium. He was gracious enough to order the tanks at cost for the club. We were able to afford five tanks, with individual gift certificates for each tank. The tanks came in on time and I quickly got them home to get them stuffed before delivering them to ONC. Thanks Dave!

The tanks were outfitted with samples of food, dechlorinator, a free PVAS Junior membership certificate, a certificate for Centreville Aquarium to buy fish and supplies, and a tank care booklet that I quickly put together. The booklet outlines how to cycle the tank, what kind of fish are best suited to the small tank, maintenance procedures and how kids can reach us on the club website for advice and help.



Five goody bags of samples and a gift certificate were prepared to go with the tanks.

The tanks were delivered to Our Neighbor's Child a week before Christmas. Kelly Lavin, ONC director, was thrilled with the tanks and said, "We often don't have enough gifts for older kids and teens, so these tanks are really appreciated!" The tanks were wrapped and delivered to the kids just days before "The Big Day".

Who knows, maybe someday years from now, we'll get a new member who says he was drawn to the hobby after getting a small tank as a kid, during a hard time in his family's life. Whatever happens, I know our members felt really good donating to such a worthy cause, past president Andrew Blumhagen's words came to life through the example of our club members, and needy kids woke up to find an extraordinary gift under the tree that has the ability to spark a lifelong interest.

Thanks again to everyone who donated!



## The End of the Tale

By Paul Lord

It is the first of March, and for several days I have been thinking about spring. And yet there is snow on the ground! (Actually, I'm not a fan of winter - I've been thinking about spring since October.) Specifically, I have been thinking about what, if anything, I'm going to do in the wasteland that is my back yard this year, how I will set up my container pond, and what fish I'll put in it. I've also been looking at my long-empty 125 gallon show tank in my living room, and making plans for the Southeast Asian biotope I intend to set up starting this month.

Spring is supposed to be a time for new beginnings. I said I was planning to start a SE Asian biotope in that 125 gallon tank - I can't really call that a "beginning". I have been planning that project for several years. Having essentially no budget, I have been forced to build nearly everything myself. I bought the tank. I built the stand and light hood, and I ran a new electrical circuit into my living room so I could give the tank a dedicated 20-amp GFCI outlet. All of that work has finally

brought me to a place where I can begin actually doing the fish-related aspects of the project: aquascaping and adding fish. The centerpiece of that community will be my beloved loaches - the three clowns I already have, plus more to make a larger school, and another school or two of smaller loaches.

Last year, I filled my little container pondlet with guppies and feeder goldfish. I'm pretty sure the goldfish were dining on fresh baby guppy all summer, because the goldfish were fat and shiny, and the guppies - well, there were fewer guppies in September than there were in May. This year, I think I am going to try to keep the goldfish away from the guppies. I have a 50 gallon fiberglass pond form, and a 50 gallon tub. The idea, (so far only an idea - I haven't even figured out where to put the tub!) will be to place the tub uphill from the pond form, and let it overflow into the pond. Guppies in one, goldfish in the other - maybe I'll adapt Frank Cowherd's suggestion from his article "Save those babies!" and use a piece of plastic canvas to make sure no guppies are getting washed down the waterfall.

Beginning projects, continuing projects, completing others - they all tend to run together in my house. There are always projects in my 70-year-old house - between the fish and the house, something always needs to be fixed or

improved. So while spring may be a time for new beginnings, it is also a time for things to end, and still others to

continue. Summer is just a few months away...



By Steve Dell' Aria. More of his work can be found at <http://steves-art.blogspot.com/>

**Potomac Valley Aquarium Society  
P.O. Box 664  
Merrifield, VA 22116**

**Application for Membership and Membership Renewal**

Name:		Date:			
Street:					
City:		State:		Zip:	
Phone:		Email:			

**PVAS Annual Membership Dues (Circle one):**

- Individual                 \$20
- Family                     \$30
- Corresponding           \$15
- Junior (under 18)       \$ 5

**Please send this application and a check or money order to the above address, or register for membership at the next monthly meeting. Membership cards are mailed once applications are processed. Processing takes 4-6 weeks. Any questions about membership should be directed to: [membership@pvas.com](mailto:membership@pvas.com).**

**Potomac Valley Aquarium Society**

**P.O. Box 664**

**Merrifield, VA 22116**

[www.pvas.com](http://www.pvas.com)

