

THE DELTA TALE

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Spring Issue

THE DELTA TALE

Volume 36, Number 1

SPRING ISSUE

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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Cover Photo: Electric Blue Crayfish by: Rachel O’Leary

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Editor’s Tank

Spring, finally! The weather is nice, the snow is melted, cherry trees and magnolias are pink with blossoms, and if the Breeder’s Award Program forum on <http://www.pvas.com/forum/index.php> is any guide, love is in the air. This is the first issue of my second year editing The Delta Tale, and the first year was lots of fun. This year is the club’s 50th anniversary year. We have an exciting party scheduled at the National Aquarium in Washington DC in June. The Aquarium has a special meaning for the club because, 50 years ago, it was where our first meetings were held.

This issue is kind of “Sherry Mitchell Season”. Our indefatigable president has written 5 articles for this issue, plus she organized and captioned all the photos from recent events. She wrote a travelogue of her trip to the Virgin Islands this winter. (This was while we were buried under 3 feet of snow from 2 back-to-back blizzards, not that I’m bitter or anything.) She describes a project she and her husband built to convert their furnace room into an expansion of her fish room. She tells the sad story of her beloved goldfish Dandy Oranda. She was suffering from a tumor until Sherry realized the only humane thing she could do was euthanize her. She researched humane methods, eventually choosing an anesthetic recommended by the FDA for euthanizing animals. Finally, she performed an autopsy on the fish so in the future, if it’s ever necessary, she will have some experience performing surgery on fish – if the tumor had been removable she might have had the skills to treat it. Next, Sherry tells us of her summer water gardens, where she raises guppies and other livebearers outside while the weather is warm – if you want to try, she tells you how to get started. Finally, Sherry shares her formerly secret recipe for substrate for water garden and pond plants.

We do have articles not by Sherry as well. Linus Chen reports on his experiences acclimating wild-caught plecos. Lou Sandberg talks about caring for the Veilfin Tetra, *Hyphessobrycon elachys*, and the Corydoras species that it mimics, (so effectively that I couldn’t tell the difference in his photos until he told me what to look for) *C. hastatus*.

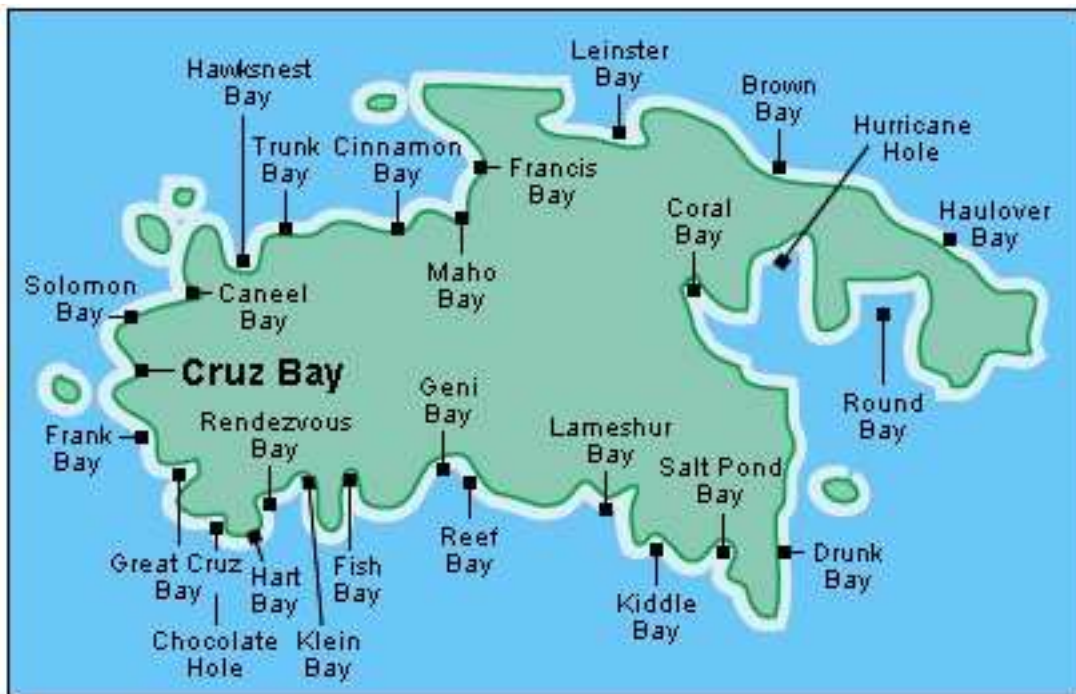
Paul Lord, Editor

HOW I SPENT MY WINTER BLIZZARD BREAK

By Sherry Mitchell

Sometimes Lady Luck is just on your side. We had been considering a vacation to celebrate our 25th wedding anniversary this past January and originally decided to do a road trip to Tampa to swim with the manatees. Mother Nature had other plans, however, and a cold snap hit Florida, making us rethink our plans. The manatees were dying from the cold, and neither Jeff nor I wanted to swim with dead, bloated manatees. So we regrouped, did a little calling around and settled on camping on Saint John in the U.S. Virgin Islands. As luck would have it, Maho Bay Camps (www.maho.org) had a treehouse tent for us and we were able to jump on a flight down to the Virgin Islands on short notice. The plan was to be back at 1:00 AM on the morning of the February PVAS meeting.

Little did we know that an 8 day vacation would span to 16 days when the massive snow storm hit back home. Luckily our housesitters were fine, the pets were well cared for and we were able to book the treehouse cottage for an extra week and avoid the nor'easter back home.



Map of St. John. The author stayed at Maho Bay, but explored many of the best snorkeling sites of the island. (photo 1)

St. John is a snorkeler's paradise and we wasted no time in getting in the water. We rented shorty wet suits and used them extensively on our excursions into the water. Most days found us snorkeling one of the many bays around the island. The beach at Maho lay just 400 steps down from our tent, so we hit that first. Other trips led us to: Leinster Bay, Waterlemon Cay, Mary's Point, Salt Pond Bay, Trunk Bay and Francis Bay. Our daily routine was simple: a leisurely breakfast and reading time in the treehouse in the morning, snorkel for a couple of hours, haul out for lunch, then back in the water for an hour or so before going back to the treehouse to clean up for dinner at the restaurant pavilion of the Maho Camps.

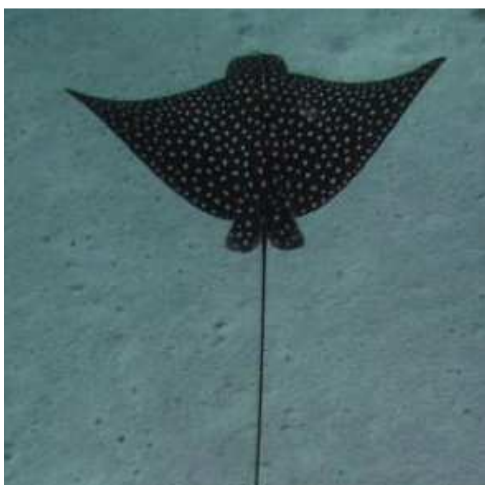
Having traveled to many of the Caribbean Islands, we decided that the snorkeling off St. John was fantastic; equaled only by our experience with the underwater snorkeling park in Barbados. Unfortunately we did not have an underwater camera, so accompanying photos here have been "borrowed" from the internet and accurately cited at the end of this article.



Sherry and Jeff Mitchell suit up for two weeks of snorkeling in St. John, USVI. (photos 2 and 3)

Marine life was teeming on every reef around the island. Our favorite fish quickly became the millions of tiny fry called ‘silver sides’ we encountered upon entering the water in every bay we snorkeled. They looked like saltwater versions of neon tetras and we would often glide into their midst and hang motionless in the water as they hovered around us. We felt like leviathans amongst them and often found ourselves moving into the shallows just to be surrounded by their beauty as we snorkeled day after day. In the shallows, corals would grow just inches from the surface, providing the perfect nursery for the fry, and the perfect hideout for juvenile barracuda looking for a buffet meal. No one ever said life was easy for these creatures.

One day, after a $\frac{3}{4}$ mile hike we snorkeled at Leinster Bay. The water quickly deepened as we worked our way towards moored boats and the strong currents made me thankful that we were both strong swimmers. It was here that we spotted an unknown eel and a juvenile eagle ray gliding along the depths. Jeff loved holding his breath and diving down to explore the depths, but the lack of visibility and fear of what lurked in the unknown kept me glued to the surface. I guess I’ve watched “Jaws” too many times to be that fearless. Nevertheless, we saw interesting larger marine life once we left the shallows and moved deeper, including the occasional turtle that day.



Juvenile Eagle Ray. (photo 4)



Sea Turtle. (photo 5)

We saw all kinds of incredible sea life – much of which we were used to seeing in pet store saltwater tanks. The only difference was the massive size that the animals in the wild attained, and their sheer numbers. I never knew a Queen Angel could grow so large until I spotted a gigantic 16 inch specimen on a reef at Maho Bay one day. And the schools of Blue Tangs were unparalleled for their color, size and numbers. One minute they would be swimming in a blue cloud, and then they would turn and appear black as they shifted in the sunlight. It was absolutely stunning and in my opinion, cannot be recreated, except in the largest of public aquariums.



Queen Angelfish. (photo 6)



School of Blue Tangs. (photo 7)

There were many moments where I would stop swimming just to hover over a small outcropping of coral and watch what was going on. Damselfish guarded their coral homes relentlessly against any who would dare to invade, and brown and white gobies stood un-moving on tiny elevated outcroppings where they had the best view. Spiny black urchins waved their spines, tempting me to pet them, while smaller fish darted in and out. One square foot was a nano-world of activity and I would envision that square foot in a tank at home.

We had to keep reminding ourselves that the corals themselves were actually alive – real animals and not just frilly ornaments of the sea. The corals took a beating in 2005 when the water temperatures soared and there was evidence of much bleaching, but everywhere nature was rebounding and recreating itself. Purple seafans reached for the surface, brain corals amazed us, and the best stands of elkhorn coral I've ever seen thrived right off of Mary Point.

Larger marine life abounds in the reefs as well. Rocks that had long-ago rolled from the steep hills formed steep, jagged homes to several dozen varieties of coral. Many fish could be spotted in the shade of the rocks during the day. We saw squirrelfish, grunts and grouper in the shadows of the huge boulders. One grouper was in the same spot day after day, lounging among cleaner fish on the shady side of a natural rock wall at Great Maho Bay.



Squirrelfish come out at night to feed. (8)



Grouper hole up in shady spots. (9)

I was astounded at the rays at Salt Pond Bay. No sooner had I stepped in the water then fish were circling around my ankles. Sea turtles were abundant at the small bay as well. Everywhere we snorkeled we spotted large parrotfish, and we were always happy to watch them gnaw the algae off hard corals with their beaks. This is how sand is made, and one parrotfish can make one ton of sand for each acre of coral consumed. The water was alive with the sound of them munching and grinding away on the corals.

Other snorkeling excursions brought us face to face with pufferfish, dog fish, flounder, herds of conk, and two lucky sightings of squid. On one occasion we spotted almost a hundred squid fry lounging under a mooring buoy out by St. Mary's Point, the northernmost spot of St. John. And on our last day on the island we spotted three adult squid hovering near the rock outcropping of a beach.



Parrotfish (photo 10)



Squid. (photo 11)

Every day brought wondrous new encounters and surprises as we explored the underwater environs around the Island. I have always said snorkeling is like swimming in God's aquarium, and it really is. Nothing I could ever design and build in my home fish room comes close to what we saw on the reefs of St. John. From the tiniest cloud of silversides, to the largest eagle ray, we were lucky enough to see it all. So, the February PVAS meeting may have been canceled, but Jeff and I were still swimming with the fishes in the sunny paradise of St. John. For that we count ourselves lucky!

Photo Credits:

Photo 1: Map of St. John. <http://www.travelvi.com/us-virgin-islands/st-john-usvi/st-john-usvi-beaches/st-john-usvi-beaches.html>

Photos 2 and 3: Photos by Jeff and Sherry Mitchell. St. John, USVI

Photo 4: Eagle Ray. <http://www.indigomoon.us/images/triplog/imgtr024/0009.jpg>

Photo 5: Sea Turtle. http://www.seestjohn.com/sea_creatures_turtles.html

Photo 6: Queen Angelfish. http://www.seestjohn.com/images/sea%20creatures/queen_angelfish/queen_angelfish_juvenile.jpg

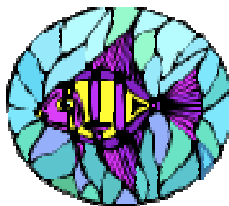
Photo 7: Blue Tangs. http://delargy.com/2006_07_Virgin_Islands/st_croix.htm

Photo 8: Squirellfish. http://www.seestjohn.com/sea_creatures_squirrellfish.html

Photo 9: Grouper. http://www.seestjohn.com/sea_creatures_grouper.htm

Photo 10: Parrotfish. http://seestjohn.com/st_john_life/life-on-st-john/st-john-virgin-islands-hawksnest-bay-snorkel/

Photo 11: Squid. http://seestjohn.com/st_john_life/life-on-st-john/st-john-virgin-islands-hawksnest-bay-snorkel/



Hyphessobrycon elachys

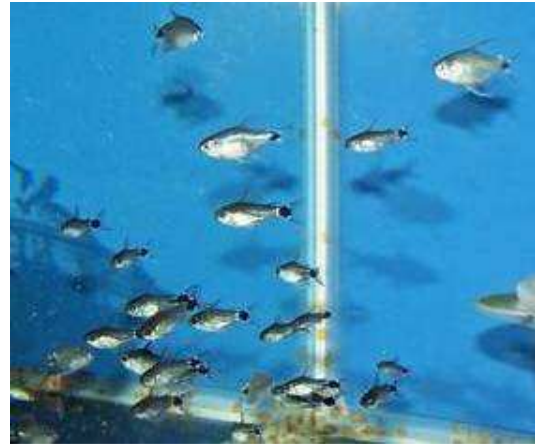
“Veilfin Tetra”

by Lou Sandberg

I first heard about *H. elachys* back in the ‘70’s. A neighborhood shop would occasionally get a couple of *elachys* with their *Corydoras hastatus* shipment, and I’d been hoping to find this little tetra ever since. The fish is a mimic of *C. hastatus*, and in nature, shoals with these dwarf catfish. (Other small fish are also found schooling with *hastatus*.) The body of the *elachys* is a bit broader than the corys, and their size is about that of an “old” mature female *hastatus* (1-1/8” TL). The male *elachys* dorsal and ventral fins have long filamentous rays that reach the caudal peduncle area. These fins are constantly being “flicked” as the fish swims about.

It’s easy to understand why this dwarf cory would be a good fish to mimic. The *hastatus* dorsal and pectoral fin spines are extremely sharp and inflict great pain if one should ever prick your finger. (The Latin name *hastatus* means “armed with spear”.) A hungry bird or fish would avoid *hastatus*, because of a possibility the catfish could become lodged in their throat and likely be fatal to the predator. As mimics, *elachys* are thus also avoided.

In spring of 2009, I learned of a *H. elachys* source and immediately sought them. I bought eighteen, setting them up in a 10 gal tank with 50% RO water and a large clump of Java moss. They all seemed to adapt well to these surroundings; however, several days later I did abrupt 30% water change and lost five fish. On subsequent water changes, I added the exchange water very gradually.



The larger fish in the upper right are *H. elachys*, the smaller fish in the lower left are *C. hastatus*.

A week after receiving the *elachys*, I decided to add about a dozen *hastatus* to their tank. The reaction of both species was most remarkable. The catfish were unceremoniously dumped into the tetras’ tank. The species formed two small schools and eyed each other from a distance of about three inches. This position lasted for a several moments and suddenly they seemed to recognize the other as “long lost cousins”. The two groups merged and swam together thereafter. (I assume that the *elachys* were wild caught fish and may have experienced schooling with *hastatus*. The *hastatus* were raised in my tank and had never seen another species.)

I currently have three male and two female *elachys*. I’m hoping they might spawn, but thus far my attempts have been unsuccessful. Their *hastatus* tank mates are spawning, and the *elachys* do not seem eager to eat the eggs. At least if they occasionally do so, it is not a feeding frenzy.

In the event that I am successful in spawning this interesting little tetra, I promise to write an article “*Hyphessobrycon elachys* – Part 2”.

Footnote:

This fish was first collected in Eastern Paraguay - 1981 and described by Marilyn Weitzman in her paper December 4, 1985. Proceedings of the Biological Society of Washington – 98 (4), 1985, pp. 799-808

15 TANKS IN 80 CUBIC FEET

How You Can Expand Into a Closet-Sized Space

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By Sherry Mitchell

People have said that keeping aquariums is like eating potato chips – you can't have just one. It's true and pretty soon after I jumped back into fish-keeping a few years ago, I realized I would need more tanks, more gallons of water, and more area to grow out the fry that I was aiming to get in my fish-breeding attempts.

My fish room is in the basement next to the furnace room where I keep all the flotsam and jetsam of the hobby. The Python hoses are in there, as are the brine shrimp hatchery, utility sink, gang valves, tangles of airline tubing, old suction cups and a million other little things that keep the tanks up and running. Twenty years ago (before the fish hobby got a hold of me) when the basement was finished, I had the contractor install three shelves in the furnace room with shop lights so I could start seeds for the garden. Years later, I found that the warm furnace room was the ideal spot for my growing collection of *Betta splendens*. It was warm and I was able to do water changes and medicate the sick fish I rescued to good advantage. Besides, it was windowless, an advantage for me, as I hate looking at snow all winter!



The space before the rebuild. Home to jars and bowls of rehabilitated bettas.

Betta bowls gave way to an assortment of 2.5 and 5 gallon tanks, but it was clear that the shelves were not constructed to hold much weight. The supports were just toe-nailed in place and it was just a matter

of time before we had a disaster on our hands. Enter the husband/carpenter.

I've always been the "designer" and Jeff has always been the "builder" in our 25-year marriage. It's a relationship that works. I'm the big thinker; he's the executor of my dreams. I professed that the goal was to cram as many tanks, as possible in the roughly 4 foot by 2 foot area. I wanted nothing smaller than 5.5 gallon tanks and wanted several 10 gallon tanks in the system, all run on one central air pump.

Jeff got to work on what he loves best -- demolition and work began.



Jeff Mitchell working on the shelves for the furnace room fish grow-out rack.

The project went fairly well. Jeff used screws and bolts to secure the braces in place to handle the weight of the tanks, and we even sat on each shelf to ensure it would hold the weight. Working around the house's central iron beam was tricky. So was cutting the shelves around existing copper in the wall, but Jeff handled the job like a pro.



Shelves had to hold 125 to 400 pounds and were screwed and bolted in place.

Once the braces were in place Jeff cut shelves from MDF to fit the bracing frames he had bolted in

place. I painted the topside black and the bottom white, using an oil-based paint that would hold up to water. The black topsides showed through the bare glass-bottomed tanks, and the undersides of white provide reflective qualities to the shop lights that Jeff recessed and mounted under the support braces.

The goal was to get as many tanks in as possible, while still having enough headroom between shelves to work on water changes comfortably. That necessitated some creative thinking with the light fixtures. Recessing them up in the support bracing of the shelf above each row of tanks enabled us to gain four more inches of work space with the tanks.



Recessed shop lights mounted inside the bracing of the shelf above the row of tanks. Screws were driven through the metal flashing of the light and into the shelf above. Bottom of the shelf above is painted white to add some reflective properties.

The back wall of the space posed a problem, in that it was covered with paper-covered insulation. I was concerned that water would splash on the insulation and create a breeding ground for mildew. That was remedied with a \$2 white plastic tablecloth from the local party store. Before Jeff secured the shelves in place, I crawled into the space and stapled the white plastic to the back wall covering the insulation. The white coloring of the plastic was reflective and further added brightness to the space.

Fortunately electric access to the rack was easy. Back when the furnace room was a seed sprouting station, I had an electrician put in two outlet boxes with four outlets each, so electrical was not a problem. However, I knew that the room would be super cooled in the summer once the air

conditioning unit came on and the heat went off. The temperature would go down from a sufficient 73 degrees to 70, which would not be ideal for fry grow out. If I was going to use the tanks for grow-out in the summer, I would have to heat the tanks.

Having a sump filter would have made the heating issue easy. You throw a heater in the sump and all your return water is heated. I didn't want to drill the tanks, however, and there really wasn't room for an adequate sump system, and certainly no room to clean a sump well in that cramped space. So, I decided to install a long power strip from Jehmco at the top of the rack for the use of small 25 watt heaters in each tank.



A 16 outlet power strip, and 18 outlet gang valve from Jehmco, mounted at the top of the rack takes care of electric and air for all 15 tanks.

John at Jehmco was invaluable in helping see the project through. He recommended the power strip, gang valve and air pump for the rack, and we followed his advice. Now when I need additional heat in a tank, I plug in a heater and it's done. There is no fumbling with tangled cords. The power strip keeps everything neat and orderly.

I planned to use sponge filters and old-fashioned box filters for the rack, so the gang valve came in handy. There was a little play between the white plastic backdrop and the shelves, so I was able to feed the plastic tubing down behind each shelf and into each tank. I made sure to give each filter plenty of line to ease removal for monthly filter rinses.

Not wanting to see the white plastic and all the cords behind the tanks, I chose to paint the backs of

the tanks. I used acrylic craft paint from the craft store and chose Tahitian Blue. It's a nice aqua blue that does not compete with the colors of the fish and it's bright and cheery enough for the room.

As each tank was going to go in end-out, I was stumped on what to do about tops. I discovered that the local Ames Hardware Store cuts glass so I had tops cut for each of the tanks. The back portion of the tank is covered with a solid sheet of glass and the front is covered with a removable piece with a handle. Both pieces slide on the 1/4 inch rim inside the top of the tank.



With end-out tanks, traditional tops will not work. I had the local hardware store cut glass for the tops.

The cut glass was cheap and worked really well for the tanks – especially when they became home to the young crayfish I was growing out. The crays could not escape with the glass tops in place. The glass was sharp though, so I covered the edges of each piece front-piece with plastic report cover spines. I also bought tool dip and plan to dip each edge in the tool dip when the weather warms up to give each edge a protective coating and prevent cuts. In the meantime, I'm careful.

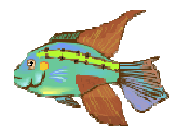
The finished product gave me 15 tanks on one central air pump.



The Project is almost complete with 14 out of 15 tanks in place. Not a glamorous room, but it gets the job done for growing out fry and gives the author an additional 105 gallons.

I finished with one ten gallon quarantine tank on the floor, four ten gallon tanks on the bottom shelf, and two upper shelves of five 5.5 gallon tanks on each of two shelves; a total of 105 gallons of water. I ended up with 15 tanks in about 80 square feet of space which is about the size of a standard closet. I figure if I lived in a townhouse or condo with this crazy hobby, I could build into a closet and easily get the same results.

One benefit to the new tank rack is that water changes are a lot faster and easier for me. I can quickly move the Python from tank to tank, and get water changes done on all the tanks in about an hour. It's nice having all the smaller fish in one area, and convenient for checking fry throughout the day. I enjoy sitting on an old egg crate and watching the fry. It's cozy with the furnace chugging along through the long winter days.



Euthanizing Fish

(Warning: Graphic Photos)
by Sherry Mitchell

Putting an animal to sleep is never an easy task, but as responsible pet owners, it is something we must do from time to time to end suffering. Such was the case with Dandy Oranda, one of the big goldfish in my fish room. For more than a year we watched as a tumor grew on Dandy's wen. We treated her with a variety of medications, but the tumor slowly grew along with the wen. In time, her wen completely covered her eyes and she was weighted down by the massive tumor on her head. I considered several options, including fish surgery to have her wen trimmed with a vet that specialized in fish. Unfortunately, Dandy was not a good candidate for surgery. Her overall health was compromised and we suspected that this \$1.49 goldfish had been mass-produced on a foreign fish farm where no regard to overall longevity or health was concerned.



Oranda showing tumor on wen.

Over time her fins began to degrade and she sat on the bottom of the tank in the corner for most of the day, only moving when it was chow time. Her tank was kept scrupulously clean, and the dither fish in her tank (a comet that always helped her find food and kept her calm) was in perfect finage, so I knew it was not the tank conditions. Dandy just could not keep up health-wise and she had no quality of life left, so it was time to make some hard and fast decisions.

I consulted the internet and friends in PVAS and found that there are a variety of methods used in euthanizing a fish. Some people slice the spinal cord, some put the animal in the freezer, and some used an overdose of clove oil. Further research indicated that an overdose of the anesthetic Finquel (MS-222) was humane and used by veterinarians. In addition, Finquel is the only FDA approved drug for sedation and euthanasia of fish. The literature said that the fish basically just goes to sleep and it seemed like a peaceful end for our dear pet. So, I decided to find the Finquel and use it. A quick Google search showed several sources for the drug and I was able to order a 5 mg bottle of it from Dr. Foster Smith for \$25.99. It was more than enough for the job, and I figured it would be handy to have the bottle on hand in case of further need.



Five-gallon bucket, baking soda, Finquel, and tools to do a post mortem wen trim.

The instructions indicated that $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon (along with an equal dose of baking soda) per gallon was sufficient for sedation. Euthanasia requires double the dose so I added 1 teaspoon of the Finquel and baking soda to a five gallon bucket. I scooped water from Dandy's fish tank into a clean bucket and found it horribly ironic that it took 13 scoops from an old plastic slurpee cup to get to the two gallon mark in my fish room bucket. I gently lifted Dandy out of her tank and placed her in the water. She settled right down and within ten minutes her

respiration had slowed. Within an hour she had found her end. It was peaceful and the only thing I noticed was a slight reddening of the veins in her fins.



Dandy finds her end peacefully and humanely

This form of euthanasia is also useful if you plan to do a post mortem on your fish. It keeps the body of the fish intact and does not compromise tissue like freezing would. I was able to remove the fish from the Finquel solution and perform a post mortem wen trim on Dandy after I was sure she was dead. The wen trim gave me practice, should I ever have to perform surgery on future fish. Personally, I felt that it gave her ending meaning too – she gave her body to my crazy fish room science and I felt solace in that.



Postmortem wen trim for practice using surgical scissors. Further work on the tumor revealed it to be spread throughout the wen and inoperable.

As for the tumor, Dandy's post mortem showed that the tumor was deep, vascular and spread throughout her wen. The wen trimming itself did not produce much in the way of blood, but the tumor was another story. It was deep and vascular. It was clear to me during the post mortem that the tumor had won.

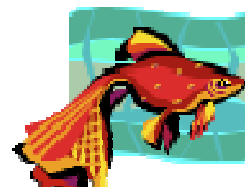
I had never trimmed a fish wen before, so the experience in wen trimming was valuable. The wen itself sliced easily with sharp surgical scissors. It was like cutting through thick almost hardened jelly and I gained valuable experience in how to correctly remove the wen from around the eyes of the fish. Trimming the wen really wasn't that hard and now I know how to do it for the future.

If Dandy had not been euthanized, and if this HAD been a real wen trim, I would have returned her to fresh water after the surgery to revive her from the anesthetic. Afterwards she would have been returned to a clean tank with a treatment of salt and many clean water changes while she healed.

In the end I was sorry to see Dandy go, but I was thankful for the Finquel. Finquel is a wonder drug and I highly recommend it for sedation or euthanasia. It should be on the shelf of every fish room, because you never know when you'll need it.



Dandy in her prime. RIP Dandy Oranda.



PVAS' 50th ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION JUNE 5TH!

PVAS will celebrate 50 years as the area's leading freshwater aquarium club on June 5th at the National Aquarium in Washington D.C. The National Aquarium holds a special significance to PVAS, as that is where the very first meetings were held when we were just a simple guppy club.

50th Anniversary Committee chairman, Gerry Hoffman has been at work for over two years preparing for the special events. He has had old issues of the Delta Tale scanned onto CD's, had gathered all the old logos, supervised the creation of a commemorative calendar and has created several "history lessons" for club members.



The evening promises to be special. Harry Chow, a long-time curator of the aquarium could not be with PVAS for the February meeting as planned (Due to the blizzard of 2010!), so he will be giving his special 3-D presentation at the event. Appetizers and cocktails will be catered, and PVAS members will have the run of the entire display for the evening. The gift shop will even stay open for the first hour.

Members can get more information by logging onto the PVAS forum and going to the Member's Only section. Registration is available on-line now, so be sure to make your reservation early. Join us in celebrating this grand birthday celebration instyle!

GARDEN GROWN GUPPIES

(and other livebearers)

by Sherry Mitchell

I don't know where I got the idea to grow fish outdoors. Perhaps it was spawned by the goldfish pond I keep or the desire to be outside in summer versus in the dark fishroom. The fish room is fine for the winter, but once summer hits, I want to be outdoors every day.

I really don't know how it got started, but when I jumped back into fishkeeping in earnest a few years ago, I found myself with too many fish and not enough fish tanks. With livebearers that can happen fast! I figured, why not stick them out in the garden where the sunlight will warm the water, the fry can eat the relentless mosquito larvae, and I can keep an eye on them as I go about my gardening chores...?

So, a "pod" of guppies moved outside to a big pair of big ceramic pots and a couple of plastic storage boxes. That first summer I didn't even put a filter in the pots. I let the guppies go "native" with plenty of plants in their pots and fed them whenever I remembered they were out in the nursery area of my garden. They flourished. I had a bumper crop of fine young snakeskins and half-black reds at the end of the summer and immediately knew I was on to something. The reds were more vibrant, the greens more colorful and the fish just seemed hardier for having been on their own outdoors.



If it can hold water, it can grow fish! The author has used ceramic pots, plastic storage boxes, old tanks, and decorative fiberglass tubs for her outdoor fish.

The following year I grabbed a couple of bags of mollies from the PVAS mini auction and grew them out in a much nicer set up in my garden. I had a 40 gallon fiberglass tub that was outfitted with a large sponge filter and planted heavily. It made a nice statement next to our front door and I enjoyed sitting on the steps looking at the molly fry all summer.



The molly grow-out pot by the author's front door.

The pot was planted with dwarf water lilies, pickerel weed, a young canna lily, water lettuce, and plenty of submerged hornwort and anacharis. I fed the mollies algae tabs and flake food and changed 50% of the water once a month. The mollies spawned and thrived and their natural colors were intensified by the richness of the sun.



Baby molly fry grow out among the plants.

By the middle of October, the great experiment was over and the fish were auctioned off, sold to the local fish store, or brought back into the fish room. The tanks were broken down and turned over to

save them from cracking with ice in them. I saved the best fish to breed indoors over the winter with thoughts of eventually transferring them back outside next summer. So, the cycle will continue.

Overall, growing fish outdoors was a cool experiment. I now have plans to expand the operation with tanks in the nursery area of my garden for more mollies, swordtails and guppies this spring. Having found a deal on four 50 gallon breeder tanks on Craigslist, I plan to integrate the tanks into an area of the yard that contains my potting shed and nursery of plants. It's an area where I work every day during the warm weather, and where I will enjoy being with the fish.



The new outdoor tanks will go in the garden nursery where the fish can be cared for throughout the summer.

If all goes well, I may even expand with more outdoor tanks and different fish. I figure even leaky tanks would work, since they're often dirt cheap, kept outside and I don't have to worry about ruined carpets or floors with slow leaks.

Sometimes, when I'm daydreaming, I think about a 400 gallon round acrylic cylinder in the middle of a grove of four redbud trees in my yard, where my fancy goldfish could vacation in the summertime. Until I hit the lottery, the custom-made tank will have to wait, but I can enjoy my smaller tanks in the meantime.

Growing fish outside is healthy for the fish and fun if you spend more time in the garden than the fish room in the summer. I guess there's a reason why



Close-up of the great outdoor molly experiment. Summer 2009. The mollies thrived and became very friendly; coming to the surface whenever someone walked by.

so many fish farms are located in warmer climates outdoors. It makes sense when you see the results. From now on, I figure I'll always have a pot of fry next to the herbs, flowers and tomatoes, to nurture as Mother Nature intended.



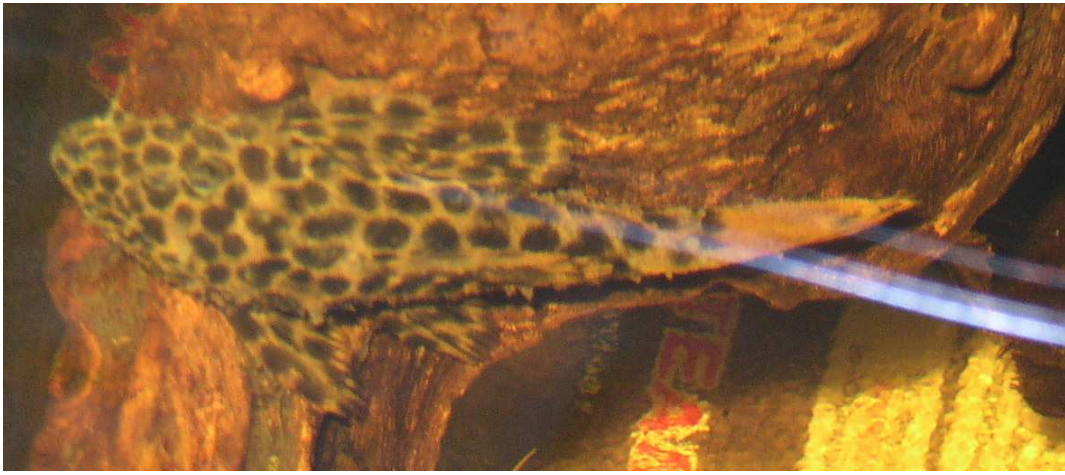
Photo by: Rachel O'Leary

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Acclimating wild-caught imported fish (Or, what I wish I knew before I ordered plecos from Aquabid.)

By Linus Chen

As folks may have seen on the PVAS forum, I bought some fancy plecos from a reputable dealer on Aquabid. I got several L-114s, or red sternella/leopard cactus pleco (*Pseudacanthicus* cf. *leopardus*) in January. About a week later, two of the fish looked to have come down with some disease (not a surprise as these fish were just imported from South America). Through the greater aquarium internet family—the PVAS forum, www.planetcatfish.com, and www.monsterfishkeepers.com — the diagnosis was velvet (a variety specific to plecos). I'm happy to say that six weeks later, the disease appears to have disappeared and all the fish seem to have acclimated and are doing well. But during those intervening four weeks, I got lucky and gained some helpful advice, that I'll pass on now, which was likely responsible for the fish not dying.

Top of Page: The problem that started it all: note the growth/spot by the tail where the light beam crosses the tail.

Right: The 15 gallon quarantine tank: you can see one L-114 on the right, the tail of the other one on the left under between two pieces of bogwood, and the L-52 at the bottom center.

The only thing I did correctly, and probably my most important tip, was that I set up a quarantine tank. Mine was 15 gallons, which, when filled with bogwood, was the right size for my four 2-3.5" SL L-114s (and an L-52, or butterfly pleco (*Dekeyseria* sp.)). Though these plecos will eventually go into a 75 gallon tank, having a smaller

quarantine tank was ideal for two reasons. First, with the smaller tank size, it's easier to observe the fish and to see how they're doing. If I put these fish directly into the 75 gallon tank, I probably would not be able to easily see the individuals as they would likely hide somewhere I could not easily see them, and thus not see the disease that they had. Second, when I went to treat the fish, I was treating the fish, not the tank.

(Someone on the Monsterfishkeepers forum was treating a 125 gallon tank, which gets really expensive compared to a 15 gallon tank.)

After determining that the fish came down with velvet, it was time to treat them. I was told that this variety of velvet that afflicts plecos is especially virulent, so immediate action was needed. Unfortunately, I had nothing to treat the fish. I rushed to the local Petco in Cleveland Park (I live in Foggy Bottom), and could not find any medicine with Metronidazole; I did buy some Melafix, which was also suggested. It was Sunday, all the stores closed early, so I couldn't go to another LFS in time. The next day, I went to PetSmart in Bethesda that had some medication with Metronidazole (Jungle Labs Parasite Clear Tank Buddies), but unfortunately was not the strongest medication recommended; I bought it anyway and treated the fish with it in the morning. I was told I really needed API General Cure, which had Metronidazole in strong enough concentrations, so that afternoon I went to Congressional Aquarium for it. I did a big water change to dilute the medication I used, added API General Cure, and anxiously waited. So tip 2: have some API General Cure on hand before you receive any newly imported wild caught fish (Melafix is also helpful to have to treat any minor wounds).

After a week of treatment with API General Cure and Melafix,



the velvet appeared to go away. The fish were cured and I was relieved, but two weeks later, the velvet came back. Luckily, out of sheer laziness, I kept the fish in the quarantine tank. So once again, I treated the fish with API General Cure and Melafix. After another week of treatment, the velvet appeared to clear up again. After 4 more weeks, the velvet seems to have disappeared for good with no re-occurrence. In consulting with one (successful) planetcatfish member, he suggested that fish be quarantined and medicated for 30 days; it appears to take about 30 days to expose latent hatching parasites to a therapeutic dose. I think my multiple treatments fulfill his advised course.

There was one horror story where someone lost 5 beautiful fancy plecos (3 new L-14 sunshine goldy plecos, *Scobinancistrus aureatus*, and 2 established L-25 scarlet plecos, *Pseudacanthicus* sp.) to some unknown disease or parasite; though the new plecos were quarantined, they were never treated with any medication (<http://www.planetcatfish.com/forum/viewtopic.php?f=5&t=28844>). A prophylactic treatment with medication may have helped (though there seems to be some dispute to whether to use medication to prevent diseases, not only to treat an observed ailment). Also, in the above mentioned disaster, a longer quarantine period may have spared the 2 established L-25 scarlet plecos from the fatal disease that affected the L-14 sunshine goldies first. The generally recommend 2 weeks is much too short, especially for valuable fish. Four to six weeks appears to be the minimum, whereas five to eight weeks appears to be the ideal period to quarantine fish. So tip 3: Quarantine your fish for as long as possible, and while quarantining your fish, consider treating your valuable fish with a broad spectrum medicine. Quarantine for at least four weeks; eight weeks would be ideal.

So to recap:

- Put your newly imported wild caught fish in a tank that's not too big so you can observe them more easily, and treat the fish, not the tank. Include decorations/hiding places in the tank to help the fish adjust
- Have medication ahead of time to treat the fish. API General Cure contains several types of effective active ingredients at strong enough quantities. Melafix also appears to help speed up the healing process, or another general cure-aid.
- Quarantine your fish for as long as possible. Two weeks does not seem to be enough for parasites. At least 30 days, if not 4-6 weeks; 8-12 would be ideal, especially for really valuable fish.

If you would like to see how these plecos are doing, I've been giving periodic reports on monsterfishkeepers to other fellow L-114 pleco enthusiasts:

<http://www.monsterfishkeepers.com/forums/showthread.php?t=302345>



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-- MEMBERSHIP NEWS --

Many members have not renewed for 2010!
Please go to www.pvas.com to renew your dues today!



Did you know that PVAS has a new membership category? The Corporate membership category is for businesses and costs \$40 per year. If you have a fish-related business, or if your company would like to be a part of PVAS, please join the Corporate Membership category. Partnering with PVAS has many advantages!

WEIRD FISHY NEWS

by Sherry Mitchell



Aquarium Springs Leak in Dubai Mall

According to an article by Kraig Baecker on gadling.com, a giant fish tank inside the Dubai mall sprang a large leak last month, causing a mild panic as shoppers scrambled for dry ground and maintenance workers rushed to repair the crack. The 2.6 million gallon tank contains 33,000 fish including 400 sharks. The crack was repaired with no loss of life.



Karim Sahib/AFP/Getty Images

The Dubai Mall Fish Tank, sans leak.

Funny Exchange From Fark.com

GiantClownShoe: I get the whole serenity of the watching fish kinda thing.....

LukeLightning: It's only serene if it's not your own aquarium. Otherwise you see it and start thinking, "Is the water too cool? I hope the nitrogen waste is breaking down..... is that too much algae? \$%&@ fish stop biting that other fish! And you two... when the \$%&# will you lay some @#\$&% eggs already!"

Blind Angler Catches Record-Breaking Catfish



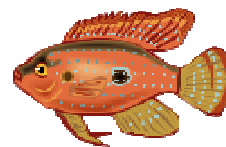
"We're going to need a bigger tank...."

An article on pawnation.com, by Paul Ciampanelli details a 214 pound catfish, caught by a 5'3" BLIND grandmother. Shiela Penfold, 56, brought the leviathan in, in a 30 minute fight using halibut pellets as bait. The fish was caught near Barcelona and after photographing the happy angler, the fish was released.

FLYING KOI SPOTTED – brought to you by The Chive.com.....



Cover the pond folks, or this could be your koi!



December Holiday Party Pics!

Despite the snow, 28 brave members came out for the holiday party. Gerry gave a hilarious presentation, presents were exchanged, great food was feasted upon, a mini auction was held, donations were given to the “Give a Kid a Tank” program, the president gave out award presents, and the board presented the president with a gift as well. A good time was had by all!



Gerry Hoffman showed off the new Lands End products with the club logo. Nice shirt, Gerry!



Sherry gave away free bumper stickers and recognized hard-working members of the PVAS team.



Gerry, Sherry and Rick Dotson enjoyed the party.



There was so much food and it was delicious!



Susan Ramirez and her son, Christian won the 20 long! We really did give a “kid” a tank this year!



Sherry received a beautiful platter from the board of directors.

Holiday “Give a Kid a Tank” Program a Huge Success!!!

PVAS was successful in raising nearly \$600 in December to give tanks to needy kids through the “Give a Kid a Tank” program. Marineland even donated three tanks! In all, eighteen tanks were stuffed with new products like gravel, food, ornaments, silk plants, a booklet from PVAS on how to set-up, stock and maintain the tank and a free junior membership to the club. The tanks were distributed to the kids through Our Neighbor’s Child, a local charity. Many thanks to all who donated to this important program in 2009!



At PVAS “headquarters”, Jeff printed the booklets off while Sherry and college student, Tookie Phan stuffed the items in the tank boxes. Buddy watched from the couch. It was a festive evening!



At Our Neighbor’s Child, student volunteers loaded the 18 tanks into the warehouse for processing.



The tanks were placed on tables filled with gifts for older kids and teens in the massive warehouse.



Student volunteers from local high schools gathered gifts for each household. The warehouse had hundreds of markers on the floor, one for each needy home receiving gifts. Over 2300 children received gifts in December of 2009.



Our Neighbor’s Child founder, Kelly Lavin and PVAS president, Sherry Mitchell share in the holiday spirit.

January PVAS Meeting Pics!!!

48 People braved the windy, frigid weather to come to the January “Water Workshop”. Jeanne Bailey from Fairfax Water gave a stimulating presentation on where our water comes from and how it’s treated, Rick Dotson tied her information into aquarium usage, and the entire audience tested their water with test kits donated by API.



First gentleman, Jeff Mitchell enjoyed the water presentation.



Jeanne Bailey discusses Ozone while members of the audience form an “organic compound chain”.



Jeanne explained that our water comes from the Potomac River and Occoquan Reservoir.



Club president and members test water from their tap and tanks with the donated API test kits.



Charles Hunter, Michael Barber and others test their water with drop kits and strip kits.



Members tested pH, nitrite, nitrate, phosphate, ammonia, copper, GH and KH. All results will be compiled by city for members use.

PVAS MARCH MEETING PICS



Sherry and Rachel chillin' after the "Invert" presentation. Rachel looks like a movie star!



Susan and Christian enjoyed the auction.



Kurt auctioned along with David Snell and kept things moving. 108 items in the auction!



Rachel and Cristy talk Inverts.



Michael Barber just back from Peru...
(photo by: Li-Wei Chih, neoprodigy.com)



Gerry took care of the group buy this month.
(photo by: Li-Wei Chih, neoprodigy.com)

SUPER PET EXPO PICS!



Sherry shows off the new PVAS sign in booth #800.



Jesse volunteers on Saturday with a cast on his leg!



Cristy and Frank set up the booth. Six tanks on display!



Terri Vance talks to a fish lover on Friday evening.



One of the nano tanks. The nano's were hot!



Little Linda enjoys Susan's betta tanks.



Sherry does a water change on the goldfish tank.



Bucky nearly knocks over the 55 gallon tank! Dog loves fish!



Mayur works the booth on Saturday evening.

Show Stats:

- 289 entries for the 20 gallon raffle giveaway
- Over 2000 pieces of PVAS literature handed out
- Two water changes on the goldfish tank
- Five neon tetras eaten by the angelfish in the 55
- One nano tank sold
- Four bags of Swedish fish handed out to the kids
- Seventeen volunteers, four days, 27 show hours
- **ONE SPECTACULAR SHOW!!!!**



Larry and Michael work the booth.



Sherry's Aquatic Plant Potting Soil Recipe

by Sherry Mitchell

Osmocote Time Release Fertilizer

One Part Heavy Garden Compost or Topsoil (no peat!)

One Part Walmart Red Bag Plain Kitty Litter

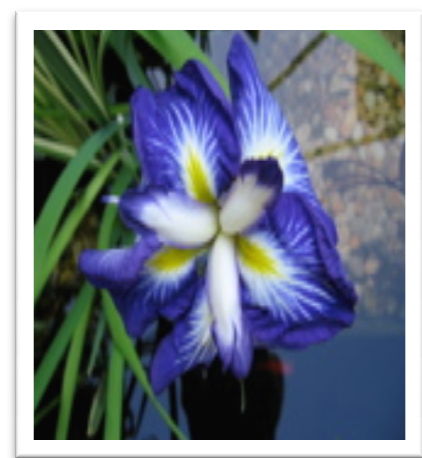
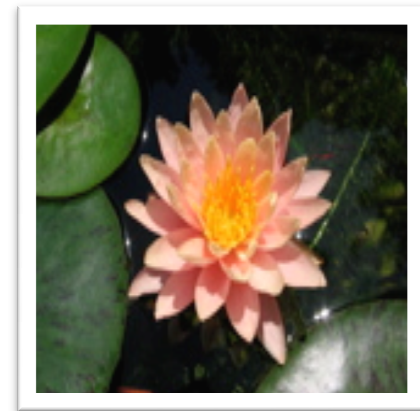
Gravel

(1) Spoon a couple of tablespoons of fertilizer into bottom of planting pot, layer garden compost on top.

(2) Plant aquatic plants, then top with a layer of kitty litter, wet with water, and top with gravel.

(3) Slowly sink to desired level in pond or water garden.

(4) Repot as plants get root bound.



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PVAS Annual Membership Dues (Circle one):

Individual	\$20
Family	\$30
Corresponding	\$15
Junior (under 18)	\$ 5
Corporate	\$40

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.

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