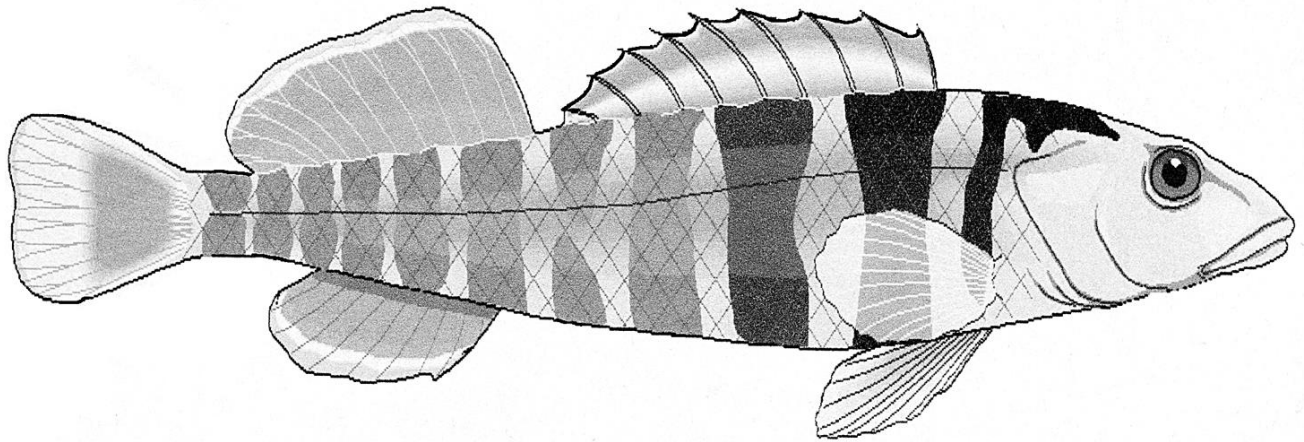


# *The Darter*

March - April 2013



**Missouri Aquarium Society, Inc**  
**St. Louis, Missouri**

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MASI's official web page: [www.missouriaquariumsociety.com](http://www.missouriaquariumsociety.com)

Join the all-new MASIFishHeads Forum. See web page for instructions.

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# Places to Be / Things to See

March Council TBD

April 12-14 2013

Spring-Fling Fishy Thing Show, Banquet, and Auction  
Crowne Plaza St. Louis Airport  
Setup Friday  
Show, Speakers, and Banquet Saturday  
Auction Sunday

THURSDAY April 18, 2013

General Meeting, 7:30 PM @ Dorsett Village Baptist Church  
Re-scheduled LED lighting workshop

SATURDAY April 20, 2013

Executive Council  
Hosted by John Stollhans

THURSDAY May 16, 2013

General Meeting, 7:30 PM @ Dorsett Village Baptist Church  
Saltwater Program  
Raffle for 50 gal Crystal Sea Marine Mix courtesy Marine Enterprises

SATURDAY May 18, 2013

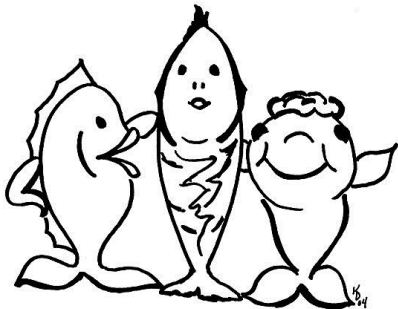
Executive Council  
Hosted by Cory Koch

THURSDAY June 20, 2013

General Meeting, 7:30 PM @ Dorsett Village Baptist Church

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## *Membership*



Yearly membership in the Missouri Aquarium Society, Inc. is \$20 per calendar year for members receiving a paper copy of the Darter. Starting in 2013, it will only be \$15 for members electing to receive the Darter electronically. Membership includes the Darter subscription for the year, which is currently 6 issues. New memberships and renewals can be submitted at club functions such as meetings and auctions, or by contacting Ron Huck, our membership chair.

# FROM THE PRESIDENT'S TANK

Pat Tosie

Exciting Times, and we are always looking to get better. We just had our first auction at the Crowne Plaza and had a few challenges, but as usual, MASI and our attendees dealt with the issues and made this auction one of our most profitable yet. We had such a huge turnout, that we had to expand into a section room and even with the additional cost, everything turned out great. Thanks Mike for guiding us through the bumpy change and making it through with flying colors.

Coming up April 12, 13 & 14, MASI's Annual Spring Show & Auction and is titled:

## Spring Fling Fishy Thing!

will be held at the Crowne Plaza Hotel - St. Louis Airport just south of Hwy 70 on N. Lindbergh. Our speakers include Dr. Eric Hanneman, Mike Wickham, Rusty Wessel and Mike Hellweg. We have a talk scheduled for Friday evening with a pizza party/hospitality room to follow. Talks all day Saturday with our annual banquet that evening and Giant Auction on Sunday. Once again Ray "Kingfish" Lucas will be set-up in our vendor room and others will be announced as they commit. There will be 10 show classes this year, and as an added bonus, your 1st entry will be free. Start grooming your fish to show! If you have any questions, see Scott Bush.

Member of the Year 2012 nominations will be due shortly, and voting to follow so that the award can be presented at our Annual Banquet.

MASI's election time is just around the corner, and we need some new members to step up and get involved. You can talk to me, or any one of the council members of your interest and help our club be the best it can be. There is no secret to being an officer or council member, just the willingness to help guide the club. Our Vice-President, Kathy Deutsch is in charge of nominations and will be looking for people to run for President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer, and Council members. If she is too busy, talk to any of the council members or drop a note to me.

One very important job that will be opening up is Editor. After 10 years as Editor, Steve Deutsch wants to take a break and will be stepping down. Steve has done a fantastic job and has kept our publication one of the top in the country. I would like to thank Steve for committing himself so deeply and doing such a wonderful job. With that said, we need and must have someone willing to step forward and fill his shoes. I'm sure Steve will give a lot of help during the transition.

Keep looking below water....

## Editor's Notes

Steve Deutsch

One more Darter done, four more to go. Don't be shy, you can do it. You need to know Word, enough Excel to get stuff out of other people's files, and a little bit of some image management program like Photoshop helps make pictures print better but isn't strictly required. Other than that, you need to be able to stand up at the meeting and say "I need articles". I can provide more details on what I do to anyone that is interested.

The editor, like the auction chair and the show chair, is also an automatic member of the executive council, giving the editor the opportunity to shape the operation of the club as well as report on it.

After ten years at the end of this year, it is time to give someone else a turn at the typewriter, so why not you?

This issue we have two articles from Mike Hellweg, one from Ed Millinger, one from Cory Koch, and a letter from Gary Lange. It is always great when we have this much content from our members. We also have two exchange articles. Deadlines for articles are April 15, June 15, August 15, and October 15.

# Auction Chairman's Message

Mike Hellweg

What a great way to start off 2013! We had the largest turnout for an auction, the most buyers, the most sellers, the highest average per item, and the largest gross receipts. Our raffle brought in more than any non-show weekend auction has done before, too. For those who didn't come, we actually overflowed the auction room and had to have the hotel open up the room next to us! At one point, we had well over 200 in attendance. There were a lot of folks in the room who had not come to an auction in many years, and they spent money. Many of them joined the club, too. Welcome to all of you! Folks still got some great deals, and our sellers are all smiling, too.

As a result of this, for future auctions, we will have the two rooms open from the start so we don't run into the overflow problem again. This is one of the biggest benefits of using the hotel – we have more room. The sound system is much better, too. But more room and a better sound system means that the room will cost us more, so we need buyers and sellers. We need you! Support your club. Even if you only bring a couple items, bring something. Come to the auction, even if just for a few hours. Bid on something. Buy something! Buy raffle tickets! For the show auction, bring your good stuff! The raffle tank for the next auction will be a 125 gallon tank, top, light, and stand supplied once again by Tropical World Pets. Please let the folks at TWP and all of our other supporters know how much you appreciate their support!

I hope we see all of you at the next auction, April 14, 2013. The auction will start at 11:00 am with a dry goods auction of items donated by Kingfish and his many supporting companies.

And for now, 'nuff said  
Mike  
[auktion@missouriaquariumsociety.com](mailto:auktion@missouriaquariumsociety.com)

# MASI NEEDS YOU!

## Elections-Council-Officers

Kathy Deutsch

In June, we will elect our next Executive Council and the 4 officers of the club. Now is the time to learn about, think about and (hopefully) run for a position in our club.

In order to keep the club moving forward, we like new ideas and people eager to implement them. Do you like the club? Join our Executive Council and keep it going. Not happy with the way the club is run? Join Council and work for change.

Ideally, we would like 2 or more people running for each elected officer position (President, Vice President, Treasurer and Secretary). There are potentially 6 positions open on the Executive Council, as well. You must be a current member in good standing to run.

### Brief descriptions of each job:

**EXECUTIVE COUNCIL MEMBER**-hosts one Executive Council meeting per year (can be at a restaurant or other place, as well as at their house), attends Executive Council meetings, possibly communicates with committee heads and reports at meetings, listens to members and brings their ideas to Council.

**PRESIDENT**-runs and manages General and Executive Council meetings. Keeps in touch with Council members and other officers to insure the smooth running of the club. Makes sure committee heads have what they need to do their jobs.

**VICE PRESIDENT**-runs meetings in absence of the President. Keeps the audio/visual equipment and brings it to events and meetings. Sets up and runs the monthly programs, as well as the raffle. Gathers a slate of candidates for elections.

**TREASURER**-handles the finances of the club. This is a job that requires some accounting skills. Attends events, meetings and auction reconciliation, to handle the money collected by the club. Presents Treasurer reports to the club and historian.

**SECRETARY**-pays attention to club business at General and Executive Council meetings, and takes accurate notes. The notes are written up and read at Executive Council and General Meetings. Presents meeting minutes to the historian.

If I can answer any questions, or to put your name on the ballot, please contact Kathy Deutsch at [kathy@skdeu.com](mailto:kathy@skdeu.com) OR 314-741-0474

# The Gold Barb *Puntius semifasciolatus*

By Mike Hellweg

The legend of the origin of the gold barb is an aquarium hobby mystery story. It goes back to the early days of the hobby's great expansion after the Second World War. Most likely it was developed in the late 1940's. The first reference in hobby literature I have found is dated 1951, which means it was well established by then. By the mid-1950's, it can be found in trade catalogs and it was noted in books of the day. It is reported to have first appeared as a xanthic sport of *Puntius semifasciolatus* from a spawn of wild type fish from southern China. This is reported to have happened in the tanks of the well-known New Jersey breeder Thomas Schubert. With careful tending and line breeding, Mr. Schubert was able to establish a true breeding strain. By the early 1960's the hobby literature was calling this golden strain *Puntius "schuberti"* in his honor. This was never a valid name. The golden form became so popular that by the late-1950's it had replaced the wild type fish almost completely in the trade. To add to the confusion, somewhere along the line the common name of gold barb also became attached to *Puntius sachsi*, a completely different species that has always been very rare in the hobby. *P. sachsi* is a pale yellow fish with random black spots and yellow fins called the goldfin barb. When you see the two fish side-by-side you'll never confuse them again, but since the goldfin barb is so rare, the confusion continues to this day! Nowadays you can find the gold barb online and in literature as *Puntius semifasciolatus*, *P. semifasciolatus shuberti*, *P. schuberti*, or *P. sachsi*! In addition, many European authors don't recognize the genus *Puntius* and put all barbs in the catch-all genus of *Barbus*! So this one little fish, a domestically developed strain, can be found by searching for as many as 8 different "scientific" names! Whew!

While their history is a bit cloudy, no one can argue that the gold barb is a striking aquarium resident that is a perfect fish for the community tank. Their bold yellow coloration highlighted with moss green on their flanks and bright orange to red fins, their friendly demeanor, and their bold nature that keeps them out in the open all day long help to win them many fans. Many long time and advanced hobbyists, including me, keep them in at least one tank even to this day. Like their distant cousin the goldfish, the gold barb is fun to watch and a great reminder that this is one of the main reasons for our hobby – the pure, relaxing joy of sitting in front of a tank of fish, just watching them.

Since gold barbs are domestically produced fish, all fish are farm or hatchery raised. While they don't bring a lot of money, they breed easily and are always in demand so many local breeders produce them. This means that you can often buy locally raised fish from your local aquarium store. They can also be found at local aquarium club auctions and even from online sellers.

Like most popular barbs, they are not picky about water parameters and are greedy feeders. They will eat any type of aquarium fare. To enhance their colors, you should feed them with special foods designed to bring out colors by the addition of natural pigment enhancing foods like astyxanthin, spirulina, and carotene. I feed my gold barbs a staple diet of spirulina based flakes along with fresh vegetables a couple of times a week. To bring them into spawning condition, separate the females from the main tank. I enhance their diet with frozen meaty foods like brine shrimp, mysis, and bloodworms along with live foods like white or black worms, small earthworms, and daphnia for a week to ten days prior to spawning.

A simple spawning setup will produce all of the gold barbs you could ever want. Give them a 5 to 10 gallon tank with a bare bottom in a room that gets some natural light early in the morning. Add a half



dozen or so yarn spawning mops, some floating and some sinking, at one end of the tank. Make sure the tank is covered, too, as the spawning frenzy can become hectic and fish have been known to wind up on the floor otherwise. Add the female to the tank and give her time to settle in. Add the male in the evening before the lights in the room are turned off for the night. They will spawn at first light the next morning. If the male doesn't begin courting, the female will often begin courtship, nudging the male. After a hectic chase, the pair will move into the spawning mops and quiver together side by side, the female releasing a dozen or so eggs and the male fertilizing them. This will be repeated several times over the next couple of hours until from a couple hundred to as many as 400 eggs are laid in the spawning mops.

At this point, remove the parents as they will now be tired and hungry and are not above eating their own progeny. The eggs take two to three days to hatch, depending on temperature. The fry remain on the bottom for a day or two after that, then are found hanging on the glass and mops for another day or two. Then they begin the first attempts at swimming in short hops. By the next day, all will be up and swimming, looking for their first meal. They will take commercial fry foods for egg layers, microworms, and by the third or fourth day, newly hatched brine shrimp. When all are eating brine shrimp, you can discontinue the commercial fry food.

From this point on, growth is rapid and by the age of two months the fry will be large enough for you have to find homes for them. If you have built up a good rapport with the owner of a local fish store, you will likely be able to trade them for food and other supplies.

## The Princess of Burundi *Neolamprologus brichardi*

By Mike Hellweg

The cichlids of Lake Tanganyika, or Tangs as they are often called in the parlance of today's online jargon, have been incredibly popular in the hobby since they first appeared in the hobby nearly 50 years ago. Lake Tanganyika, one of the Lakes in the Great African Rift Valley, is home to dozens of popular aquarium fish. One of the most popular is the Princess of Burundi, also known as *Neolamprologus* (sometimes just *Lamprologus*) *brichardi*.

These stunning little cichlids, usually topping out at less than 4" standard length, have beautiful extensions on their caudal fin giving them a very delicate appearance, though nothing could be further from the truth. They are very hardy and can be recommended as a beginner cichlid for someone wanting to try Tanganyikan cichlids for the first time.

In the wild they are found in rocky habitats in fairly shallow water. They live in family centered, multi-generational colonies. They don't need to swim around a lot, so one would think they can do well in smaller tanks, but if you want to breed them, a 29 gallon or larger tank would be the absolute minimum, and I would recommend something larger. Fill the tank with a pile of rocks or cobbles piled from the base to the water line. This will create the myriad caves and passageways these beautiful little cichlids will call home. Oddly, the more you provide them with cover, the more they will feel comfortable and spend time in the open.

While they can be kept with other species, in the confines of an aquarium less than six feet long, it is really in the best interest of all the fish to keep them in a single species tank. It won't be long before they colonize the entire tank anyway, making life miserable for other species, so it's best to just leave the other species out right from the start.

The waters of Lake Tanganyika are low in dissolved organic compounds and fairly clear, so the species coming from the Lake require good water quality, and *N. brichardi* is no exception. They prefer water with a pH over 8.0 that is very hard and alkaline. The easiest way to provide this is to use a commercial substrate designed for Lake Tanganyikan fish. This contains minerals that slowly dissolve in the water, helping to maintain the pH, hardness and alkalinity. I also use a liquid commercial water supplement that adds trace minerals. In addition, when I run my RO filter for soft water species, I route the discharge water into my Tanganyikan tanks so there is no waste water. Even though this water runs through a carbon block filter first, I still take no chances and add a dechlorinator to the tank as a precaution. Finally, to ensure no dissolved organics build up, I also perform fifty percent water changes every week.

Filtration is also important. I usually use sponge filters in most of my tanks, but to avoid the buildup of waste products and provide good circulation I use a waterfall type power filter on my *N. brichardi* tank. I change one of the filter cartridges every week, adding extra carbon to the replacement cartridge. It's just a bit of extra insurance.

Many people keep their "Tangs" at temperatures in the low 80's Fahrenheit, but this is unnecessary. Temperature in the Lake is pretty consistent and ranges from about 72 to 77 degrees Fahrenheit, so they will be happy with a temperature in the mid-70's. I keep mine at 76 degrees Fahrenheit and have done so for many years with no problems. My fish even spawn in the winter, when tank temperatures can drift down as low as 70.

Feeding is not a problem. They will take live foods like newly hatched brine shrimp, adult brine shrimp, and daphnia. They will enjoy these foods frozen as well, and you can expand their diet a bit by adding frozen copepods, mysis, and even shredded shrimp or krill. Finally, they will also take a high quality crustacean based flake or pellet that can even be used as a staple diet, with the frozen or live foods added a couple times a week.

If you provide them with a nice, rock filled tank with a good diet and proper water, they will spawn with no additional help from you. It is incredibly difficult to sex *N. brichardi*, so the easiest way is to start with a group of six to eight juveniles and let them grow up and pair off in the tank on their own. They will begin spawning when they are about two-thirds grown. They spawn in the caves created by the pile of rockwork and usually the first hint you will have that they have spawned is when you see free swimming fry darting around the rocks. There is no need to remove the fry. The adults allow them to become part of the colony. The adults will spawn regularly and each successive batch of fry will move a bit further from the main spawning site, but will still remain in the family group. Larger siblings don't harass their younger siblings, but instead will help defend the colony and babysit the young fish! This is another reason for using a larger tank – the colony will need room to spread out.

As long as the main pair continues to spawn, which can continue for 5 or 6 years, the younger fish, even after they reach maturity, will not spawn. It's a good idea to thin out the colony occasionally, removing some of the larger juveniles for sale or trade to other hobbyists or your local shop, where *N. brichardi* can bring good prices since they are always in demand. If you have built up a good rapport with the owner of a local fish store, you will likely be able to trade them for food and other supplies.

# Letter to the Membership

## More Speakers for the MASI Monthly Meeting

from Gary Lange

One of the things that I truly enjoyed at the MASI monthly meetings were the many top drawer speakers that we used to have. Month after month we would bring in some of the finest speakers from around the country to entertain and educate us with their particular obsession in our great hobby. Lately though we've gotten out of this habit and I would really like to change this. If elected as your Vice President for the 2013 session I would like to bring back this great tradition. We have plenty of dollars in our treasury so there really isn't any reason for not bringing in a lot more speakers from outside of our club.

As a former Vice President for many years and as a show chairman for quite a few more I have had the pleasure of bringing in quite a few speakers so this is something that I already know how to do and I already know most of the speakers and their specialties quite well. I know many of them first hand so they are just a quick email or phone call away. As a speaker myself I get to go to a lot of clubs and workshops so I get to meet and hear a lot of the up and coming talent first hand. In the past many of the people that we had to our meetings I had already heard so I knew you would like them and we wouldn't be spending our money on a speaker that wasn't quite ready for prime time.

I also believe that the vast majority of speakers would rather stay at a member's home instead of a hotel so I've put up quite a few of them over the years. I have become good friends with a lot of these speakers because of this and look forward to seeing them again at the various workshops. Not only does this save the club money it also is a great way for you to get to really know someone. I would really encourage you to volunteer to host one of our speakers in the future and show them some real MASI hospitality. I think you will find it to be a great experience. If elected VP I will encourage this option for our speakers and really suggest that our members take advantage.

We don't have the great fish stores of the past so hopefully we'll be able to show our speakers around to our many fish rooms. It's a great way to spend some time with the speaker, get to know them better and maybe even find out a few of their fish raising secrets. It's amazing how much knowledge gets paid forward when the mic isn't turned on.

If elected for VP I already have a lot of speakers in mind that you really need to see! That said I am also looking for your input so if you hear of someone new that you'd like to get here, let me know. I would also like to make sure that from now on we have speakers lined up months in advance and have that information both on the website and the forum. We have members that drive up to two hours to get to our meetings so we ought to make sure that they know the drive will be worth it that month. You might even plan your vacation around a meeting date to make sure that you are here when your favorite catfish person comes to talk. There are quite a few non-MASI members on the Facebook Group called "St. Louis Aquarium Club". Having our speaker list posted well in advance might also entice them to show up to a meeting and maybe even become a member. You know with a little advanced planning there's no reason we can't bring in an overseas speaker and share their costs with another club or two. If our neighboring clubs can do this we should be able to do this too.

If elected Vice President I already have some good candidates for speakers in mind including topics on: Planted Tanks; Collecting Killifish in South America; Angelfish Genetics; Collecting Cichlids in South America; Digital Fish Photography; and Setting up a Planted Pond tank. None of these speakers have ever spoken at a MASI meeting or show so they are brand new but all are quite entertaining.

Anyway, if you would like to see some new and exciting speakers in the new cycle I'll need your vote of confidence to help make this happen. Please attend the June meeting and vote for Gary Lange for Vice President. Thanks.

Speakers that I've brought in previously for Monthly Meetings or Shows

Gene Lucas – Bettas	Sallie Boggs – Oddballs & Loaches	Karen Randall – Planted Tanks
Doug Sweet – Fish Health	Spencer Jack – S.A. collecting	Charlie Grimes – multiple talks
Jeff Bolbach – Fish room & AB	Dave Schieltz – Fish Gadgets	Chuck Davis – Catfish & Cichlids
Tony Terceira – Killifish	Steve Lundblad Peacock Cichlids	Dan Dority – New Guinea
Gilbert Chen – Koi	Chris Newell - Cryptocorynes	Tullio Dell Aquila – LED's
Alex Saunders – Madagascar	Ted Judy – Cichlids	Mike Schadle – Livebearers
Klaus Schoening Natives	Bob Allen – Raising Tang. Cichlids	Patrick Nabors Poison Dart Frogs
Mark Soberman – Corys	Rusty Wessel – Central America	Joe Fleckenstein – Corys
Terry Fairfield – Fish Health	Mark Schmidt – Showing Fish	Jim Powers - Loaches
Jeff Cardwell – S.A. collecting	Ad Konings – Collecting in Africa	Paul Loiselle - Madagascar
Jeremy Basch – Catfish	George Fear – S.A. Collecting	

## HAP Report January - February 2013

Mike Hellweg

Member	Species	Common	Rep	Pts	Total
Gary Lange	<i>Alternanthera reineckii lilacina</i> *		V	15	1230
Gary Lange	<i>Crinum calamistratum</i>	Waffle Leaf Bog Lily	V	20	1250
Gary Lange	<i>Hydrocotyle sibthorpioides</i>	Lawn Marshpennywort	V	10	1260
Gary Lange	<i>Hygrophila balsamica</i>		V	15	1275
Gary Lange	<i>Limnophila sp. wavy</i> *	Wavy Leaf Figwort	V	10	1285
Gary Lange	<i>Lindernia rotundifolia variegated</i> *	Watermelon Plant	V	10	1295
Gary Lange	<i>Ludwigia glandulosa</i>		V	10	1305
Gary Lange	<i>Pogostemon erectus</i> *		V	15	1320
Gary Lange	<i>Potamogeton gayi</i>	Narrow Leaf Pond Weed	V	10	1330
Nick Scarlatis	<i>Cardamine lyrata</i>	Chinese Water Ivy	V	10	15
Nick Scarlatis	<i>Lemna minor</i>	Dwarf Duckweed	V	5	20
Cory Koch	<i>Egeria densa</i>	Anacharis	V	5	25
Cory Koch	<i>Spirodela polyrhiza</i>	Giant Duckweed	V	5	30
Cory Koch	<i>Vallisneria spiralis leopard</i>	Leopard Val	V	5	35

Reproduction Key: V = Vegetative, OB = Outdoor Bloom, IB = Indoor Bloom, S = Seedling

\* = MASI First

Note: Due to the weather related postponement of the February meeting, this report is complete through the February auction. Any submissions at the February meeting will be printed in the next Darter.

Publication deadline did not permit waiting for a complete February report. [Editor]

# NJAS Sandy Stories

## How You Made It Through The Hurricane

Reprinted from the January 2013 Reporter of the North Jersey Aquarium Society

**Richard Devita** -- Here in wet Hoboken, we lost power on Monday night, at about 9:30. No backup. Continued to aerate with an empty fish food container, upside down, adding circulation and air. Added heated water. Finally, after no power through Wednesday night, placed coral, mushrooms, anemones, shrimp/ fish etc. in a few buckets, with small battery aerator.

Traveled to Target in Edgewater (off River Road - two names that do not bode well with a Hurricane), only to learn that it did not carry tanks, and that the Sheriff's office was not letting me back into town. Found a way in, and out of Hoboken with family, cats and what I could rescue from tank. Purchased a small survivor tank that worked for a week, until its inexpensive filter broke. Made it back into Hoboken on 11/7 to vote and survey old tank, which held up better than expected - lost all coral and anemones and a fish or two, but after a few major water/ sand changes/ cleaning all appear to be lively and healthy.

**Steve Gobbo** -- Steve located a gasoline to natural gas converter kit that attaches to your gasoline generator and converts it to natural gas. The converter's cost is determined by the brand of generator you have but ranges anywhere from \$50 to \$200. The converter attaches to your generator's carburetor. If you have a generator and stood in the lines for getting gasoline you may want to look this gadget up online. You will also need a natural gas connection with a quick disconnect, the type of connection used for a natural gas barbecue grill. There are many different brands for these converters and they are also available for propane as well. Search for "Gasoline to Natural Gas generator converter" and you'll get plenty of hits.

**Jim Costello** -- In late August I returned from my Mother's house after a visit with my son. On the way home I stopped at an auction of an electrical supplier. The auctioneer allowed the owner to bid once for each lot. When a generator came up, one person bid \$100, a second bid \$125, everyone was quiet and the owner bid \$150, the man then bid \$175 and the owner bid again saying \$200. The auctioneer got livid and said, "I told you one bid per lot" and he then said sold for \$200 pointing to the man who bid \$175, the bidder protested, "Saying I only bid \$175." I said quietly, "I'll give you \$200," the auctioneer yelled, "Sold" and I brought the Briggs-Stratton generator.

On Sunday, knowing what we were in for I filled up three of the water 30 gallon conditioning tanks of the type I put up for auction with water in the kitchen (2) and bathroom (1). I filled up the fresh 100 gallon Tang water and the Malawi water tanks in the basement. I also filled the 300 gallon water tank by the pool as a replacement source for the upstairs tanks. I moved everything away from the front of the garage, opened the door and settled the generator there. Then I went to the gasoline station and filled up a five gallon and two one and one half gallon containers. I returned to the station to refill the five gallon container.

**Al Bennett** -- Al uses an old style bicycle pump modified to accept aquarium airline tubing to push air into his tanks. He moves from tank to tank and pumps air into the tank for 5 to 10 minutes each once or twice a day.

**Diana White** – Diana found a free Smart Phone App, “FoxFi” that allows you to create a “Hot Spot” using your 3G or 4G Smart phone. Once the “Hot Spot” has been created you can connect your wireless computer to the internet. We were without our cable conection for 9 days. Once my wife set up the “Hot Spot” we were at least able to get back on the internet and log in to work. It’s a nifty little app if you have a smart phone.

**Ray Wetzel** -- Just as a number of members here use a natural gas space heater to maintain the temperature in their fish rooms, so too do I since it regulates the heat in all the aquaria without the need for individual tank heaters. The tanks in my fish room never went below 76 o to 78 o, and the heat coming up through the floor resulted in a fairly comfortable (for me) 65 o upstairs.

However, there were yet six tanks upstairs which do not receive the benefit of the space heater. While five of these tanks contain Killifish, which do fine at 65 o, a 55 gallon tank containing adult (8 year old) Angelfish was without needed heat. To maintain their temperature, I floated gallon ice tea containers 95% filled with boiling water in their tank every 4 to 5 hours throughout the six powerless days (yes, and through the nights). Fortunately, my gas range can be lit with a match, although I understand some of the newest ones have a solenoid which shuts off the gas supply if the power goes out.

Even though I had heat in my fish room -- albeit, no air -- one of my main concerns was in keeping any fry fed to prevent their starvation. So, I resorted to the old brine shrimp hatching method of using just a flat container of brine water (in this case, as plastic shoeboxes), and hatched small quantities of BBS out to ensure the fry got at least some nourishment. This method mandates that only about 1/4 teaspoon of brine shrimp eggs can be added to the airless hatcher at any one time, as to use more would just serve to suffocate the batch.

Since I have only two south-facing basement windows, I waited until around noontime to feed the fry in efforts to provide as much light to them as possible. Even then, some tanks were not lit nearly enough to enable the fry to see their food. I then used some of those old cordless battery operated "Touch Lights" -- the ones that can be mounted in a closet, or stairway or any other place where one has no electrical wiring. I suspended them over the tanks, from the ceiling tile grid work, in large fish nets; the ones used by wholesale outlets that many of us have for larger Cichlids. All worked out well, even though the BBS hatcher didn't produce all that much. Still, nothing starved.

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## Electronic Distribution Now Available

For those who prefer, the Darter is now available electronically, instead of the paper distribution. To change from paper to electronic distribution, email me at [editor@missouriaquariumsociety.com](mailto:editor@missouriaquariumsociety.com). You will get your Darter sooner and the club will save printing and postage. And, starting in 2013, you will save \$5 on your membership.

# *Nomorhamphus towoeti*- the Black Halfbeak

By Joe Reich

Reprinted from the January February Tank Topics of the Greater Akron Aquarium Society



Halfbeaks are live bearing fish from Malasia. They have sleek, slender, torpedo shaped bodies with a long beak attached and look like needle fish or north American gars. They are called halfbeaks because the top beak only reaches out about half the length of the bottom beak. At least usually. I'll go over that remark shortly. Their beaks allow them to take any insects that happen to alight upon the water with ease. For that reason they generally like to stay in the upper part of our aquariums, near the water's surface where they await a chance at a morsel of food. Wingless fruitflies are munched down with gusto! So far, of the three species of halfbeaks that I've kept and bred, none of them needed to be kept on a live food diet. Quality flake and pellet food has been the mainstay, with frozen bloodworms, brine shrimp and mysis shrimp added a couple times a week as a treat. On the rare occasion, I'll offer some wing-less fruitflies or white worms. In short, feeding is not a problem! Even though these fish aren't piscivores, I wouldn't trust any halfbeak with fish small enough to become a meal! That includes newly dropped halfbeak fry! Yes, unfortunately they are cannibalistic. *Nomorhamphus* don't have any problem taking food from the bottom of the tank either, unlike *Dermogenys* which stays up at the top. Their "beaky" appearance, the fact that they stay small as compared to gars and needle-fish, and the fact that they give birth are what attracts me to keep this "oddball" livebearer.

So now some information about our Black Halfbeaks. For starters, they aren't exactly black. But if I had to give it a common name, that would be a good choice! Like all halfbeaks, they are mostly light gray in color with a white, silvery underside. However our Black Halfbeaks do change color depending on their mood! I have seen them from nearly all black to regular gray, all in a matter of seconds! The coloration over the body is not very uniform. They could also easily be called marbled. One of my males looks like he has 3 evenly spaced light colored vertical bands on one side, but the other side of him is entirely different with it nearly completely black. Sometimes the females will have a faint orange blush on their body just under the dorsal fin. The trailing edge of the anal fin of Black Halfbeaks is marked in black. From juveniles to adults of all color modes the black edging on the trailing edge of the anal fin is plain to see. Males don't have the black mark on the anal fin though. The ventral fins have a bit of black coloring in them just after the leading edge and closer to the body, other than that, the rest of the fins

lack coloration. These halfbeaks might also be called "beakless" halfbeaks. These fish have stumpy little beaks compared to most other halfbeaks. You won't see one swimming around with a broken beak anyway. The bottom beak is just a bit longer than the top, so it definitely looks like a halfbeak in that regard. At any rate, they have big mouths and can eat insects bigger than you think they would be able to. Something to be mindful of when choosing tank mates for them.

Black Halfbeaks come to us from the island formerly known as Celebes, one of many islands north of Australia. Today the island is known as Sulawesi. They can be found in Lake Towuti and also the surrounding basin area which includes Lake Matano, Lake Mahalona, Lake Masapi and Lake Lontoa. Lake Towuti is the largest of the lakes in Sulawesi with an area of 217 square miles and a depth of 666 feet and sits at an elevation of 961 feet above sea level. Lake Matano happens to be the 10th deepest lake in the world at 1,936 feet. All of the lakes are fed by mountain streams. Sulawesi is said to have 10,000 lightning strikes per day! That's a lot of thunderstorms if you ask me, so there is no shortage of fresh-water feeding those streams. Their current habitat is possibly going to be changing, if it hasn't already. There are, or were, plans to build a nickel mine near Lake Matano as well as a lumber mill. Waste water runoff from either facility into the lake would be disastrous! Because of the possibility of water visibility being reduced, the International Union for Conservation of Natives (IUCN) has listed this fish on their "red" list. Red means that they are threatened. The lake water is very clear and many species in the lake rely on visual cues for mating, and silty polluted water would have an impact on their mating behaviors. So we aquarists must do our best to preserve this species before it has a chance to go by way of the Western Black Rhino, which was declared extinct as of January 2012! Of the 19 species of halfbeaks, almost all of them can only be found in Sulawesi.

Halfbeaks in general have a tendency to squabble amongst themselves. The so called "Wrestling" Halfbeaks tend to be more aggressive among their species. The Black Halfbeak is a lot more tolerant of their tank mates. In fact, I have to say that of the halfbeak species I've kept, they have to be the most docile. That makes keeping these guys a lot easier! Don't get me wrong here, they do still have their scrums. But the most damage I ever see is the occasional torn fin. Combat happens either between two females or between two males. I have yet to see any combat of male versus female. But I have seen an unreceptive female drive off the overly eager reproductive male. For the most part, combat consists of two fish facing off with their bodies parallel to each other. Fins are spread wide and the pectoral fins are held upright behind their heads. These displays can either be aligned head to head or head to tail. When they are head to tail, both contestants start to swim around in tiny circles as if they are chasing each other. On occasion they will open their mouth a little to make their display look a little more ferocious. They also flare their gills the way cichlids do. Lightning fast, one fish will strike the other fish, or at least try to. Usually they break off combat with the end of the display and the winner will give just enough chase to the loser as if to say "beat it!" After a few minutes the same fish can be seen next to each other as if nothing had happened at all. When they are aligned head to head, they do just as cichlids do and send a blast of water with their tail fin toward the other fishes lateral line. I have also seen two males lock jaws. In that mode of combat they either play tug of war or try to push each other. This type of combat doesn't seem to last too long, but it can go on for several bouts. The loser is chased away after this type of combat a little more aggressively, but he isn't maimed or molested, at least not in the confines of my 20 gallon high tank. I haven't seen any of the females do this type of combat, so it just might be something that the males do. I also have two mature pairs in a ten gallon tank and they seem to be doing well with respect to limited aggression. Perhaps maybe because they stay so close to the surface they seem to be somewhat shy. They don't exactly go and hide, but they do go to the back of the tank at the first sign of movement outside the tank. Once they realize it's feeding time, it becomes a feeding frenzy though. They will also come to the front of the tank to satisfy their curiosity once they see the threat of danger has passed.

Sexing these fish isn't too hard at all. Even half grown fish are easily sexed. The anal fin of the male is modified, and looks a lot like the anal fin of male goodies. Sort of like it hasn't unfolded all the



way. Then there is the matter of size. Males are a lot smaller than females. My biggest male is around two inches in length from the tip of his beak to the end of his tail. The female is around three and a half to four inches in length, but she probably weighs in over three times his weight, easily! When a male tries to breed with the female, he stays just below her and a little behind. It almost seems as if he is trying to be in her blind spot. Any other males that try to take up this position get chased away. The male will hover in the blind spot until he sees an opportunity. A male's courtship display looks the same to me as when he's displaying against another male in combat, with the pectoral fins held upright against their body and all fins spread wide. Unfortunately I have my halfbeaks in a community tank. So when any fry are dropped, most get eaten. So I haven't been able to tell how many fry are actually being released. If I had to throw out an average number, I'd guess maybe 10-15. The fry are big and around 1/2 inch long at birth. Some are able to take smaller wingless fruitflies on the very first day. Finely crumbled flake food has always been my first food offering for the fry, and they take to it pretty quick. Make sure to have some floating vegetation in the tank so the fry have something to hide in. I have yet to see a female dropping fry immediately eat any. But when labor is all done she will be hungry! I do have and use one of those floating breeder fry traps, but it is old and I'm not sure if they still make them. What's unique about it is the slots for the fry to drop through, they are big compared to all the others I've seen. Halfbeak fry generally are too big to use most fry traps. I did come up with a handy do-it-yourself trap. My dishwasher decided one day that it would rather smoke up the house than wash dishes. The basket that holds the silverware had a mesh big enough for any newborn halfbeak fry to swim through! But it was quite a chore to remove the inner dividers. I attached some foam floats and all was good.

I don't do anything "special" in regards to water parameters. I have well water that comes out of the ground slightly on the soft side. The PH is between 7-8. Temperature was kept around 75\* F. The occasional water change. Some patience on my part. My above mentioned feeding regime. That was all that was needed in order to get them to spawn. Super easy! In closing this article I have to say that the game of life threw one of those curve balls at me. I didn't get to play with my fish for a couple days in a row. One thing about halfbeaks, they NEED to be fed! I purposely don't feed my fish once or twice a week, but two days in a row doesn't cut it with halfbeaks. My peaceful female Black half-beaks decided that the male of half their size would be a good meal. An hour before I found the male all mauled, he was chasing the females in his mating ritual. I hope he was successful! The best thing I ever did was to put an aquarium in my computer room. Since I spend so much time on the computer it gives me a refreshing break to look at the tank full of halfbeaks and watch their various moods and behaviors. Something that I heartily recommend for everyone.



# BAP Report

Steve Edie

Member	Species	Common	Pts	Total
<b><u>Jan 2013</u></b>				
Mike Hellweg	Betta midas *	Golden Touch Betta	20	5229
	Betta rubra *	Red Banded Betta	20	5249
	Chalinochromis brichardi		15	5264
	Pethia erythromycter *	Lipstick Barb	20	5284
	Skiffia francesae "Rio Teuchitlan" #@		20	5304
	Tanichthys albonubes "Long Fin"	Long Fin White Cloud	10	5314
Jerry Jost	Betta burdigala @		40	1790
	Corydoras duplicareus *		15	1805
	Corydoras longipinnis *		15	1820
Cory Koch	Pygocentrus natteri "Iquitos"	Red Belly Piranha	20	2732
	Xystichromis sp. "Dayglow" #@		10	2742
Jim Miller	Haplochromis sp. "Tomato"		10	2909
Nick Scarlatis	Cryptoheros nanoluteus @		20	355
	Hyphessobrycon pulchripinnis	Lemon Tetra	15	370
	Zoogoneticus tequila @		30	400
John Stollhans	Callochromis stappersii		15	245
	Hemichromis letourneuxi "Burkina Faso"		10	255
	Pundamilia nyererei "Makobe Island" @		20	275
Debbie Sultan & Tom Corradini	Cyprichromis leptostoma "Utinta"		15	40
	Tilapia bythobates @		30	70
	Tramitichromis intermedius		15	85
<b><u>Feb 2013 *</u></b>				
Mike Hellweg	Brachyrhaphis rhabdophora "Rio Grande de Tarcoles" *		15	5329
	Fundulopanchax gardneri nigerianus "Gold" *		20	5349
Steven Hoffman	Ilyodon lennoni @	Lennon's Goodeid	30	135
Cory Koch	Cryptoheros septemfasciatus @		20	2762
	Cyphotilapia gibberosa "Mpimbwe"		15	2777

	Melanotaenia sexlineata "Tabubil"	10	2787
	Pundamilia nyererei "Makobe Island" #@	10	2797
Derek Walker	Ancistrus sp."Gold Dot Bristlenose"	10	2925
	Ancistrus sp."Long Fin Red Marble Bristlenose" *	15	2940
	Hemigrammus erythrozonus           Glowlight Tetra	15	2955
	Tanichthys albonubes                 White Cloud	5	2960

\* = First MASI species spawn (5 point bonus)

\*\* = First MASI species and genus spawn (10 point bonus)

\*\*\* = First MASI species, genus and family spawn (15 point bonus)

@ = C.A.R.E.S Species at Risk (Double base points)

# = Species previously submitted = 0 points, except for C.A.R.E.S. = base point bonus

^ = Species previously submitted, limited points for additional color varieties

#### Sources:

Cal Academy - <http://research.calacademy.org>

CARES - <http://www.carespreservation.com>

\*Note: Due to the postponed meeting and Darter deadline, only Feb auction BAP items are reported here. The Feb meeting BAP items will be in the next report.

## The 2013 Spring Fling Fishy Thing!

Scott Bush (sportspicks@charter.net)

Mark your calendars...it's show time!! We are about a month away from our annual MASI show, the Spring Fling Fishy Thing. This year it will be held at our new club function location, the St. Louis Airport Crowne Plaza hotel on April 12-14. We have a great line-up of speakers, Eric Hanneman will be giving 2 talks, one on Tanganyikans and another on fishrooms he has known. Mike Hellweg will be giving a talk on goldfish. Rusty Wessel a talk on fishes of the Maya. And our banquet speaker, Mike Wickham will give a talk entitled Myths, Mysteries and Misinformation. He will also give a talk on community tanks earlier in the day. Wow! What a lineup.

There is a fish show consisting of 10 classes including fishes by family, aquascaping, critters and photography. All the info on classes and entry info is available on the website...and remember, your first entry is free!!!!

Our vendor room is filling up, and in addition to Ray Kingfish Lucas promoting the hobby in a way only he can, other vendors will be selling supplies and livestock so you don't want to miss out.

Please come out and support the club and let's make this a weekend we can all be proud to say we were a part of. For more info and any questions you might have please contact me in the show thread on the MASI forum.

[http://missouriaquariumsociety.com/FishHeads\\_Forum/viewtopic.php?f=4&t=1116](http://missouriaquariumsociety.com/FishHeads_Forum/viewtopic.php?f=4&t=1116)

# From The Fish Room

By Ed Millinger

On January 19th Klaus Bertich, Mike Hellweg and myself drove to Champaign, Illinois for the CAFE auction. Like MASI they also have large auction numbers (to prevent people from putting them in their pockets and forgetting them). Our old auction chairman Ralph Wilhelm at one time was having to make replacements after every auction due to missing numbers. When I saw Mike's bidder number I immediately thought of Stan "The Man" Musial because he had number 6. It was later that day on the drive home that we learned of Stan's passing while listening to the Blues hockey game in which they scored 6 goals.

This issue the MASI way back machine is a little different. I recently found an old aquarium plant handbook (pictures by Gary Lange) from Gilberg Perennial Farms. Located in Wildwood and run by Doug and Cindy Gilberg, they had a huge selection of aquatic plants and were very generous in their donations to our MASI auctions. They closed a little over four years ago and Cindy is now consulting, designing, teaching and writing.

It looks like the hottest thing on Aqua-bid right now is red ancistrus. A proven pair of super red ancistrus originally from Germany sold for \$390! Another auction of 11 red bristle nose juveniles sold for \$202.99! An adult unproven pair also sold for \$203. And that doesn't include shipping.

Do yourself a favor and check out [tedsfishroom.com](http://tedsfishroom.com) Ted Judy has posted a fifteen minute tour of his fish room which you will thoroughly enjoy. While you are there be sure to click on the link to the Florida Aquarium Fish Expo June 20, it looks like a really good time will be had in Fort Meyers. Twelve great speakers, a collecting trip, tour of snookin21 (a great supplier of South American fish), a fish show, a huge auction and Ray "Kingfish" Lucas will be there.

I have never been to another clubs Christmas party but I can't imagine any better than MASI's. We have been blessed over the years with some great food preparers, Rose Yaekel, Laura and Dave Wagner, and now the Koch's, Amber and Cory. Let us not take for granted what a great time we have at our meetings. The new auction site turned out to be quite a success. After many years in the southern reaches of St. Louis county it only seems fair that those who live further north should have a closer opportunity to attend. We may lose a few "southerners" but we may also pick up many from the north county area and St. Charles.

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# Club Hopping 2013

Steve Edie

More dates will be added as clubs firm up their plans.

Mar 23 – Peoria, IL: Tri-County Tropical Fish Society – Spring Auction

Mar 30-31 – Des Moines, IA: Eastern Iowa Aquarium Association – Annual Show

Apr 5-7 – Hartford, CT: Northeast Council Convention

Apr 7 – Milwaukee: Milwaukee Aquarium Society – Fish-O-Ramma Swap Meet

Apr 12-14 – St Louis: Missouri Aquarium Society Annual Show

Apr 14 – Chicago: Greater Chicago Cichlid Association Swap Meet

Apr 25-28 – Grand Rapids, MI: American Livebearer Association Annual Convention

Apr 26-28 – St Louis: Gateway Guppy Association – IFGA Show

Apr 27 – Marion, IA: Eastern Iowa Aquarium Association – Spring Auction

Apr 28 – Indianapolis: Circle City Aquarium Club – Spring Auction

May 2-5 – Cumberland Falls, KY: North American Native Fishes Association – Annual Convention

May 24-26 – Chicago: Greater Chicago Cichlid Association Cichlid Classic

May 24-26 – Portland, OR: American Killifish Association Annual Convention

Jun 20-23 – Ft Myers, FL: Florida Aquarium Fish Expo

Jun 22-23 – St Louis: St Louis Water Gardening Society – Pond-O-Rama

July 13 – Urbana, IL: Champaign Area Fish Exchange Summer Auction

July 18-21 – Denver: American Cichlid Association Convention

Aug 11 – St Louis: Missouri Aquarium Society Summer Auction

Sept 19 – Everywhere: Talk like a Pirate Day

Oct 5 – St Louis: Missouri Aquarium Society Swap Meet

Oct 10-14 – New Jersey: North Jersey Aquarium Society – 60th Anniversary Weekend

Nov 10 – St Louis: Missouri Aquarium Society Fall Auction

Nov 17 - Indianapolis: Circle City Aquarium Club – Fall Auction

Nov 22-24 – Cleveland: Ohio Cichlid Association – Extravaganza

Check with the individual clubs for more details.

# Red Belly Piranha: Killer fish or big sissies?

By Cory Koch

I have never had any desire to keep Piranha. I'd seen the media reports and movies as a child where piranha would decimate entire populations of stupid humans. I saw one where the piranha could even fly outside of water and eat stupid people in the open air (I can't remember if that was a movie or news report but what does it matter)! Now, I am very aware of the fact that I'm not exactly the brightest bulb around, so for me, keeping a super-deadly killer fish who just might fly out of its tank in the middle of the night and eat my children's faces off seemed highly irresponsible. Besides I like nice peaceful fish, this is why I tend to keep mostly cichlids.

It became clear that not everyone feels the same way about these demonic fish when a friend of mine acquired a group of wild caught *Pygocentrus nattereri* from a mutual friend whose job took him to all sorts of interesting places, including the Amazon.

"Wild" piranha, geez I wasn't very fond of "tame" piranha, and no one needed "wild" piranha, what is wrong with people? I was hesitant to visit my daredevil friend and his new man eating fish for quite some time. When I finally worked up the nerve (after running out of excuses to give his lovely wife who kept inviting us over for dinner), needless to say I was a bit skittish near the 125 gallons of sure death that held the beasts. As I slowly began to relax (this same friend has a kegerator in his basement as well fish capable of disfigurement), I stared death in the face, pint full of liquid courage in hand. The first and most obvious thing I noticed was that the fish were large, with the smallest being about eight inches nose to tail while the largest was around eleven or twelve inches. They appeared to be a glittery silver or gray color everywhere except for their undersides which was a bright reddish orange color around the throat, belly and anal fin. The fish also sport a faint black line at the edge of the tail fin. The other striking thing about these river monsters was that they were really kind of skittish. I mean it seemed that for some reason they were more afraid of me than I was of them! Could that be? Apparently they hadn't seen the same movies I had; they were "wild" caught after all. So it seemed these particular piranhas were ignorant savages, and had no idea that they were capable of eating everyone in the subdivision before noon. Good. I liked my friend's chances of survival much better now but still couldn't fathom why anyone would intentionally cohabit with piranha. After a year or so, the day came when these wild beasts began to spawn and my adventurous friend was inundated with eggs (So many eggs in fact, that he once fed piranha eggs to the baby Discus he was also raising at the time. Poetic justice?) Since somehow my courageous friend and his family had managed to avoid any piranha attacks, eventually I began to consider taking some of the toothy little fry home for myself. While against my better judgment, the only reason I even considered taking the risk at all was the hope that someday I could show my intrepid fish friend I could get the monsters to breed if he could!

As I had now foolishly agreed to bring some home I hit the internet to do a little research (yes I know you are supposed to research first, but this was an impulsive act of pride after all!) on *Pygocentrus nattereri*. The articles I read indicated that Red Belly Piranha had to be maintained in huge aquariums with very soft acidic water, that they were difficult to spawn in captivity, wouldn't spawn until they are at least eighteen months old, and that if you somehow managed to get them to spawn they would only do so in spawning mops. Well first off, my water is very hard and alkaline, I mean it's basically liquid rock, so I was screwed there, plus I didn't have a huge tank available, or even a medium sized one at the time so they went into an empty 20 gallon to start with. These monsters are

actually kind of cute when young, like the shiny little tetras that they are! So in the early spring I brought home fifteen one inch fish and placed them into a bare bottom 20 gallon tank heated to about 82-84 degrees and filtered with a simple sponge filter. I fed them often on just about anything I happened to be feeding the other fish including Exotic Aquatics flake food, Repashy spawn and grow and blackworms. I would also throw in the occasional jumper found on the fish room floor. These beasts eat just about anything and grow fast; I moved them into a 40 gallon breeder tank within two months of bringing them home. As the Piranha grew, they became even more attractive, with the red coloration intensifying to an almost neon orange and started to show small black spots along their laterally compressed flanks. The black line on the tail intensified, but a second stripe of pure white began to show up on the tail as well. My losses were minimal as long as I fed heavily every couple of days, the few times I neglected to feed the fish cannibalism followed! I knew it was time to move the fish when they started taking small bites out of each other. Some of these bites were quite dramatic, but usually only occurred when the little monsters had outgrown their current tank. Initially, I would worry about losing the fish that had sustained the gruesome attack, however each time the missing section would regenerate at an astonishing rate! Fins, tails, lips and large sections of the dorsal and abdominal areas have all grown back over the course of this breeding project. As the fish continued to grow at a rate of about an inch per month, and had started nipping each other again, it was time to upsize their tank again. I moved them to a 75 gallon this time, also heated and filtered with a few large sponge filters. By now I was down to thirteen fish and as they were looking a little “chewed up” the extra room was much appreciated. As the fish continued to grow the black spots began to fade and the silver began to take on a glittery gray look. I have never been the type to enjoy feeding live fish to Piranha, but will admit on occasion I have. Never any of the disease carrying “feeder” fish from the pet stores, but when I did it was some cichlid or livebearer that had inundated me with fry. From these feedings I learned that Red Belly Piranha are not very good hunters, even in the confines of the aquarium, the target fish I had added could easily evade the Piranha for days and sometimes several months. I joked that the piranha had adopted one particular deformed *Lamprologus brichardi* male as a pet of their own he was in the tank with them for so long! However, in my experience *Pygocentrus nattereri* are more akin to the likes of hyenas and vultures rather than lions and hawks!

Another couple of months passed and it was time to move the beasts yet again! This time it was into a 125 gallon tank complete with power filters as they had graduated from flakes to about eight ounces of fresh fish(basically whatever frozen whitefish was on sale at the grocery store) fed every other day. I suppose I should have just put the fish into the biggest tank I could to begin with, but this was not exactly a well thought out or planned adventure in fish keeping, as I said, it was really more of a “if you can do it I can do it” type of thing. And besides they were very, very small when I first brought them home and I find that keeping young fish in smaller tanks actually makes it easier for them to feed. So as one breeding project came to a close and a larger tank opened up I moved the piranha to larger accommodations. All I really lost was a few nets...

I had added two bags of cheap, course, Home Depot landscaping gravel and a few large pieces of drift wood along with all the plastic plants I could scrounge up as I planned on the 125 being the spawning tank. The lighting was kept subdued with a single 40 watt fluorescent tube fixture providing minimal light and the tannins from the drift wood adding to the overall murkiness of the tank. Two 300 watt heaters ensured that the temperature was maintained at around 86 degrees now. The dozen remaining Piranha were very at home in this environment and things were going great, for a while. I began to get a very busy with work and so of course got behind on my water change regimen and though I continued to feed the piranha (maybe a bit too heavily), the water quality had to be somewhere close to atrocious. I had gone from changing about 80% weekly to not changing any water for about six weeks! The water level in the tank was probably down by six inches due to evaporation

by the time guilt forced me to act. I went ahead and did a massive 90% water change (I mean the fish were literally flopping around on the bottom of the tank!) with water that was easily 10 degrees cooler than the water in the tank had been. The reaction of the fish was immediate; they were very pouty and sluggish. I was afraid I had overdone it but by the next day after work the temperature of the tank was back up and the fish had become extremely active! They had taken on an almost a jet black coloration and were chasing each other around the tank at top speeds, and didn't seem to like me being anywhere near the tank. I guess they didn't appreciate the cold water change from the night before! The following morning all but one of the fish had lost the black coloration they had taken on the previous evening. The one who had not was one of the smaller fish, which had excavated a bowl like pit in the gravel at the base of a plastic plant that had been chewed down to nubs. He was circling this pit constantly and chasing the other fish away if they even seemed like they might be coming towards it. As I slowly approached the glass I could see hundreds of eggs that were a neon orange color! I had thought these fish far too young to spawn as they were by now not quite a year old, but I was clearly wrong and these eggs were the proof! I then took a few low quality cell phone pictures of the pit and eggs to send to my valiant friend as proof of my accomplishment, then I pulled out a small syphon hose and carefully syphoned out about 50-100 of the eggs to grow out separately. I prepared a bare bottomed 10 gallon tank with water from the parent's tank, a sponge filter with the aeration turned up on high and a small heater to maintain the temperature above 80 degrees. The eggs became wigglers in about 48 hours, and then free swimmers about 48 hours after that. At this point I started feeding the fry with newly hatched brine shrimp, watching as they filled their tiny bellies until they looked like little orange balls with a tail and two eyes! The fry were actually pretty easy to raise, eating everything offered and occasionally each other. One or two would seem to cannibalize their siblings to the point of growing three times the size of the rest, but the joke was on them because then the bigger fish would be slowly eaten themselves by the smaller fry picking at them and eating there fins until they could no longer swim away. Back in the breeding tank, the parents did not care for the young at all when the fry became free swimmers, and I never saw any fry in the main aquarium, after a few days the darker male who had been defending the pit simply lost interest. The fry that had been separated to the grow-out tank grew quickly and were easily ready for BAP within three months.

Overall, the experience of spawning the dreaded Red Belly went much better than I would have initially thought, I didn't lose any digits, none of my children were attacked, and the neighbors did not label me a menace. I can recommend these fish to anyone with the tank space to give them plenty of room with the warning that they do have a multitude of teeth and can be potentially dangerous if spooked. Oh, and don't ever let them see any of the killer piranha movies! We don't want these fish to realize what they are really capable of...



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Steve Deutsch

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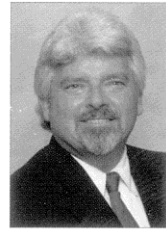
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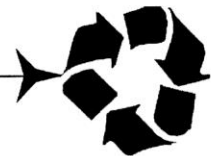
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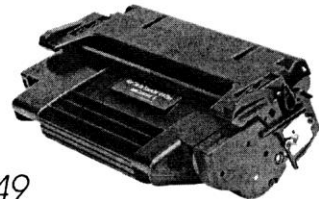
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