



Ottawa Valley Aquarium Society Newsletter

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Upcoming Events

Jan. 22

So You're Thinking
About A Pond!

By: Nicholas Bott

The Pond Clinic Water
Garden Centre
www.pondclinic.com

Feb. 25 - Spencer Jack lecture

Mar. 4 - Giant Auction

Mar. 26 - Monthly meeting

Welcome to 2007! Our club is having a great year already, thanks to you!

Our new season started in September with an excellent meeting. Approximately 100 people were in attendance! Many of us wore nametags with both their real and online monikers – it was great to finally put faces to the names. Congratulations to Trish Bezaire (*squeaker*) for winning the Fish ID quiz! The Mini Auction of 175 items was a great success and included some amazing fishes from Spencer Jack.

At the October meeting, Ron Hay (*rockgarden*) showed us all how easy it is to set up a saltwater nano tank. The tank and its contents were auctioned off at the end of the meeting and our Webmaster, Chris Murray (*DarkDep*), went home with the prize for \$40 (along with the rest of the saltwater items for sale in the auction). He reports that the tank is “alive and thriving.”

Several carloads of members cruised to Montreal for La Société d'Aquariophilie de Montréal (SAM) for their Giant Auction on November 19th. The OVAS contingent managed to win most of the door prizes and raffle draws. It was a long day but everyone took home a carload of great deals.

The November meeting was OVAS Movie Night – we gathered to view a BBC production from the Blue Planet series, “Coral Seas.” A beautiful piece of driftwood covered in java fern sold at the Mini Auction for \$27. Thanks to a change in the auctioneer lineup, many of you were persuaded to pay a dollar or two more for that special item you wanted.

David Patte (*dpatte*) held the annual OVAS Christmas Party at his home on December 1st. Despite inclement weather, many brave souls ventured over for food, drinks and fishes! Everyone was impressed by David's tanks and fish room – he obviously spent a lot of time cleaning up in preparation.

We have had three “Ask the Experts” Chat Events on our Forum (ovas.ca) since November: *Planted Tanks*, *Starting an African Tank* and *Freshwater Shrimp*. Excerpts from the chat logs are available online. We are planning many more of these chats – all are welcome to attend. If you would like to participate as an Expert, please let a member of the Executive know.

For the rest of the year, we have several events planned. Spencer Jack is travelling from Winnipeg to speak about African cichlids for our February meeting. This will be a big event for the club! Our other big event, the annual Giant Auction, takes place on March 4th at Jack Purcell. Forthcoming meeting agendas include presentations by Jody Willoughby (*babblefish1960*) on South American softwater cichlids, a killifish breeding presentation and setup demonstration by Colin and Cassandra deSouza and a how-to on getting your pond ready for the season. We also have our video home show, plant contest and bowl show to look forward to.

We have a great year shaping up! Please come out and join us at all of our meetings and events!

Chelsea Smith
OVAS Vice-President

Spencer Jack Lecture

Sunday, February 25th @ 1:00 pm

Jack Purcell Community Centre, large hall

A special OVAS meeting will be held on Sunday, February 25th in the large hall at the Jack Purcell Community Centre featuring a lecture by well-known cichlid expert, Spencer Jack.

This event is in lieu of our regular February meeting and mini-auction that was scheduled for Monday, February 26th.

Non-OVAS members are welcome, but due to the special nature of this event, an admission charge of \$5 will be levied for non-members. Members, please bring your OVAS membership card to this meeting.

Please note the lecture will be in the large hall, not in our usual meeting room. This will ensure there is room for everyone.



Spencer Jack has been active within the aquaria hobby since the age of five. A true "cichlidiot", he had been working exclusively with cichlids over the last twenty years. He has since expanded his horizons to include all types of tropical fish.

Spencer has been an active hobbyist within Winnipeg for a number of years. Some of his roles within the fish hobbyist community include: Co-founder of the Aquarium Society of Winnipeg (1989), Founder and President of the Canadian Cichlid Association (2000).

Spencer now owns and operates a tropical fish wholesale business, The Afishionados, and is still an avid fish keeper and breeder.

Spencer's enthusiasm, humour and dedication towards the aquarium hobby are easily witnessed through his lectures. All of Spencer's lectures are full multimedia presentations using PowerPoint and almost all of the pictures in use are original pictures taken by Spencer during his years in the hobby and travels across North, South, and Central America.

Spencer is a part of the American Cichlid Association speakers program.

For more information about Spencer Jack visit his website at <http://www.cichlaholic.com/>

STARTING AN AFRICAN CICHLID TANK

by Chris Murray

Starting An African Tank

Why start an African Cichlid tank? “Africans” are some of the most colourful, intelligent, and interactive fish in the hobby. They are spunky, beautiful creatures that are just *fun* to keep. If you’ve been thinking of starting an African tank, here are some of the basics you’ll need to know to get started.

Keeping Africans is not the same as keeping community fish or anything in the soft water or planted realms. These fish generally come from one of three large lakes in Africa (Malawi, Tanganyika, and to a lesser degree every day, Victoria). These lakes are huge and support incredible diversity, but have a unique water chemistry that is hard and alkaline. The lakes have very sparse vegetation, being very rocky. Setting up an African tank involves duplicating these conditions, as well as dealing with the higher aggression levels these fish possess.

The Tank

Most Africans are larger fish and need a lot of room to move and establish territories. Except for Tanganyikan Shelldwellers (which can be kept in tanks as small as 10 gallons) a 3-foot tank (~33gallon) is a *bare* minimum. Best results will be obtained with a 4 foot tank (55 – 90 gallon). As with many setups, the bigger the better.

Substrate

Because of the alkaline nature of the African lakes native water, the best substrate is one that is high in calcium. These types of substrate will (very) slowly dissolve into your tank water, raising the kH (Carbonate Hardness) of the water and help stabilize the water against pH swings. The two best substrates for this purpose are Crushed Coral and Aragonite. Aragonite comes in several sizes, from a small gravel size down to sugar sized. The size is personal preference. When shopping you may notice bags of substrate marked as being specifically designed for Africans, and they usually carry a premium price tag; there is nothing special about this substrate. Usually it is a normal substrate with Crushed Coral or Aragonite mixed in with it! Also, if you want a different colour of substrate from the plain white, you can also simply make a mix of another substrate with some Crushed Coral or Aragonite and you will still benefit from its effect on the water.

Decoration

Appropriate decoration depends on the general type of African you are keeping. In general, you want a highly rocky setup with minimal to no plants. Some tanks have rock piles almost to the surface of the water. When constructing a rock pile, be very careful to make it stable so no rocks will fall over and hit the sides of your tank. For the rocks on the bottom, push them down into the substrate. Africans love to dig. They can cause a rock pile to collapse if they dig under the base rock. Your goal is to create multiple caves and hiding places; these will be used as territories. Try to break up lines of sight so fish that are being chased can escape an aggressive tankmate.

There are a few other things to consider if you have specific fish:

- **Tanganyikan Shelldwellers** – These fish should have many large snail or sea shells available to them. You will need at least one for each fish.
- **Haps / Utaka** – These are “open water” fish and should have a little more room to swim. Don’t over-rock the tank if you are keeping these.

Filtration

Africans are big, and are messy eaters. Thus, the filtration for an African tank must be above average. For store purchased filtration, best results are obtained with Aquaclear HOB (Hang on Back) power filters, and external Canister filters. Canisters from Eheim, Fluval, Rena, and others have all been used successfully by many experienced aquarists. When sizing these, never go by the manufacturer's ratings; always go up at least one size. Larger tanks work better with multiple filters. Many swear by a combination of an Aquaclear HOB (which is great for mechanical filtration) and an external canister (which is a better biological filter).

For those with a little more DIY (Do It Yourself) capability, Wet-Dry filters and sump setups are perfect for large African tanks. Although more traditionally used in the saltwater world, these advanced setups can make your tank water incredibly stable.

Lighting

Lighting for an African tank is not important. As there are usually minimal to no plants, high amounts of light will just grow excessive algae. Lighting is only for you to see your fish.

Food

Most Africans that you will encounter as a new keeper are herbivores; they should not be fed much meat. Africans have long digestive tracts and a diet too high in protein produces a condition called "Bloat" which can be fatal. Foods containing Spirulina are highly nutritious, and can come in the form of Spirulina flakes or pellets. NLS makes a Cichlid Formula which is a very well balanced diet and is highly recommended. You can also add some variety occasionally such as brine or mysis shrimp (no more than once a week), and frozen cichlid food mixes. Africans are "grazers" so it is best to feed small amounts several times a day.

The Fish

What kind to get? There are over 200 species of African Cichlid currently known, and more species are being discovered and imported into the hobby regularly. Many of these are sensitive fish with special requirements, but there are also a lot that are perfect for beginners. In general, Africans are tough fish that are tolerant of beginner mistakes.

Because there are so many species, the majority of Africans do not have common names. This means that sooner or later you will have to learn the scientific names of the fish to know what you're getting. Although some DO have common names, a lot of them are not agreed upon across the hobby (for example; I have two species in my tanks which are called "Blue Dolphins", but they are very different fish).

A good place to look at pictures of Africans with other related information such as aggression, diet, and special requirements is <http://www.cichlid-forum.com/profiles>.

Some general suggestions for beginners that you can research:

- *Pseudotropheus* species (except *P. demasoni* and *P. lombardoi*)
- *Labidochromis* species (*L. Caeruleus*, aka "Yellow Labs" are highly recommended)
- *Otopharynx lithobates* (Mature males are very colourful)
- *Cynotilapia* species
- *Protomelas* species (these get quite large, though)

These are just some general suggestions. There are many others but the above have mild temperaments and will do well in a beginner's setup. Read about the specific fish you want to keep BEFORE you buy them...don't make an impulse purchase. You may accidentally bring home a highly aggressive fish that will tear your other fish apart.

If you are purchasing fish that can be sexed, it is ideal to keep them in a 1:2 to 1:3 ratio, Males:Females.

The Water

Africans are best kept in alkaline, hard water. Unlike some of the advice you may read, it isn't necessary for the water to be extreme in characteristics; it's more important that the chemistry be stable.

Test your tap water to determine pH, gH, and kH. Although there is much debate about the "right" parameters, the following is a good general set of parameters:

- **pH:** 7.8 – 8.2 for Lake Malawi and Victoria fish; 8.0 – 9.0 for Lake Tanganyika fish
- **gH:** 6-10 (higher is ok but not necessary)
- **kH:** 8-14 (again, higher is fine but not necessary)

For most people, these parameters are higher than their native tap water. You can do this with commercial cichlid buffer salts, or you can use the following common household chemicals:

- **Baking Soda (Sodium Bicarbonate):** This is used to raise pH and kH.
- **Epsom Salt (Magnesium Sulfate Heptahydrate):** This is used to raise gH.
- **Coarse Salt (Sodium Chloride):** This is regular table salt, without any additives. It is used as a parasite deterrent.

How much to add? Truly you should test your tap water, add the above additives, retest, etc until you get a mix that works but as an example, in Kanata (which has water coming out of the tap with pH 7.6, gH 2, kH 2) I add 1 Tablespoon Baking Soda, 1 Teaspoon Epsom Salt, and 1 Teaspoon Coarse Salt for every 5 gallons of water. When performing water changes, only add the amount of additives relative to the water you are replacing. Test occasionally (every few months) to ensure the water readings are within acceptable ranges.

Dealing with Aggression

Africans are territorial, aggressive fish. HOW aggressive varies by the species, but even the most peaceful Africans may seem like monsters to you if you have only kept community fish in the past.

There are many strategies for dealing with aggression. As these fish are territorial, it helps to have lots of territories; this can be accomplished by ensuring your rock setups have many "caves". Adding more rock means more caves, which means more territories. A large number of small territories will result in less aggression than a small number of large territories. Another way to deal with aggression is to increase the number of targets. If you have a male harassing a female, add more females. This "spreads out" the aggression so that no individual fish is overly stressed. You can also "overstock" a tank; although this is not something you should do unless you are comfortable with the requirements regarding filtration, it results in aggressive fish having a harder time establishing a territory. If a fish cannot establish a territory, it will not show as much defence behaviour.

Cleanup Crew

To assist with algae removal, the best cleanup crew is a combination of Bristlenose Plecos (NOT common or fancy plecos) and Malaysian Trumpet Snails. Trumpet Snails dig through your substrate and help to keep it from producing anaerobic bacteria, as well as becoming the occasional Cichlid snack. They breed rapidly but not out of control, and hide most of the day out of sight. BN Plecos are tough, armoured fish that can take the occasional Cichlid attack, and do a fantastic job cleaning up algae.

More Information

Ask questions! The OVAS forums are frequented by many African experts who would be more than happy to help you set up.

Annual Auction 2007

Our Annual Auction of 2007 is fast approaching. This event is one of the Aquarium Society's largest events of the year and is not to be missed.

Last year we had well over 600 items, including freshwater and saltwater tropical fish, plants, used aquariums, equipment and much more. Over 400 people attended, and there were many deals to be had!

This year we plan on making the auction the biggest and best one in the history of OVAS, including door prizes, great food and lots of excitement for all. Be sure to join us March 4th at the Jack Purcell Centre!

Further details on the pre-registration process will be available on the forum.

Art Williamson
Auction Chairman

Comments regarding this newsletter can be sent to newsletter@ovas.ca

Breeders Award Program (BAP) Update

Just a reminder that submissions for BAP Awards from CAOAC (Canadian Association of Aquarium Clubs) are due by the end of January. So far, there are already 5 new members applying for BAP awards, adding to the 3 from last year.

As well, there have now been a total of 82 species or varieties entered by 15 members to the Breeder's Directory.

For more info on the Breeder's Directory or Breeder Award Program, contact me via the forum (username: *mseguin*) or email bap@ovas.ca.

Good luck to all!

Matthew Séguin
OVAS BAP Chair

OVAS Library

One of the lesser known benefits of an OVAS membership is access to the OVAS library of reference books, magazines and DVDs. OVAS members can borrow one item per month with the payment of a refundable deposit of between \$5 and \$10 relative to the value of the item.

The list of available items can be viewed on the OVAS web site. To reserve an item, send an email to me at librarian@ovas.ca (Subject: OVAS LIBRARY BOOK) clearly stating the **Title** and **Author** of the item along with your name and phone number.

You will be contacted to confirm availability of the item and your attendance at the next meeting to pickup the book. All items are due back at the next month's meeting and your deposit will be returned.

Colin DeSouza
OVAS Librarian

Library and Archives Canada

Previous issues of OVAS newsletters can be found at the Library and Archives Canada web site:

http://epe-sys.lac-bac.gc.ca/archive/100/201/300/ovas_newsletter/index.html