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# Fish Tales

The Official Publication of the Federation of Texas  
Aquarium Societies



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My Attempts at Spawning *Betta pi*  
Braz Walker Endowment Program  
A Visit with John Hansen  
Show Judging and the Texas Fish Judging Registry  
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Cover: *Betta splendens* by Gerald Griffin OKAA.

*Fish Tales* is the official publication of the Federation of Texas Aquarium Societies and is published quarterly in electronic format. For information regarding receiving *Fish Tales*, please contact the editor at [gsteeves@gvtc.com](mailto:gsteeves@gvtc.com). All FOTAS members are encouraged to submit material for publication consideration.

In this issue...

Diversity is the theme of this issue of *Fish Tales*.

We start out with an excellent review of the biggest single body of water in Texas, the Edwards Aquifer. Walter Wooton Jr. is a well known local explorer of the waterways of South Texas and is the “goto” guy for aquatic animal and plant identifications in my area. This is the first installment in a series on the Edwards Aquifer that Walter has agreed to write for us.

The *Betta* genus is a complex group of animals that I know very little of. Gerald Griffin of Oklahoma gives us a take on *Betta pi*, a very interesting fish. With numerous societies devoted solely to *Bettas*, I

would hope that we see more content on these wonderful animals.

Rick Borstein recalls visiting a Texas legend (who is not even from or living in Texas) John Hansen. John is well known around the country for his amazing fish and tall tales. After reading Rick’s review I can only think of one thing....road trip!

The FOTAS organization is revamping much of what we do and how we do it. One popular topic is standardized judging techniques. With this in mind I am reprinting an article on the subject by Dan Martin who was a member of the Fish Judges Registry of Texas. This organization is now defunct but much of the work and ideals will surely be used in any future effort to standardize judging.

I just couldn’t put out an entire issue without a cichlid article! Duc Nguyen relays his experiences with a really cool West African biparental mouth brooder *Benitochromis nigrodorsalis*. I’ve already got my call in for fry!

Remember the big FOTAS convention is taking place this year in Oklahoma City. The dates and exact location should be in place soon. I have not heard the attending speakers or details on the show, but knowing the folks in the OKAA, it’s going to be something you don’t want to miss.

Be sure to check out the North American Discus Associations national convention taking place in Irving Texas June 10th-13th. This will be a huge event with top name speakers and a giant show.

We are compiling a FOTAS speakers listing that will appear both in *Fish Tales* as well as the FOTAS web site. This is a pool of local people that give excellent presentations. Your club will be able to work out the details of bringing a FOTAS speaker in. If you would like to be included in this listing, provide your name, contact information and the programs you give in an email to [gsteeves@gvtc.com](mailto:gsteeves@gvtc.com). This is open to any FOTAS club member.

That’s all for now, I’ll see you all again in April.



**One of the many outflows of the Edwards Aquifer System are the springs at Panther Canyon, the source of the Comal River in New Braunfels, Texas.**

## **What Do You Really Know About the Edwards Aquifer?**

**Walter Wooton Jr.**

How many of us actually ever really thought about the Edwards Aquifer? I know I never did. To me it was just a name and if it became too low I couldn't water my lawn. This all changed while doing some research on the Comal and San Marcos rivers. I found that both of these rivers are fed by the Edwards Aquifer. I was discussing the "finds" with Greg Steeves who suggested I put some of this down for all to see.

The formation of the Edwards Aquifer started back in the Paleozoic era around 500-600 million years ago. During this time the area we now call home was part of a sea and the Gulf of Mexico was a mountain range. It was then that the limestone foundation was laid for our little aquifer. Approximately 200 million years ago during the Mesozoic era, there was a rather dramatic shift where the Gulf of Mexico began to sink and become covered by the sea. What we now call Texas started

to become dry land. This was a time of great fluctuations where our local area was under a shallow sea at times and other times we were dry. The dry periods were times of extensive erosion of the Edwards limestone layer that was laid during the Paleozoic era. Sometime after this towards the Cenozoic era around 700 million years ago, the eroded limestone began to cover with varying materials but mainly what we now know as "Del Rio Clay". This earthen clay is comprised mainly of wind driven ash from volcanoes on the Pacific coast of Mexico. The clay was then overlaid with newer or younger limestone when the seas once again covered the area. As sea waters receded to the current shoreline, the sediment deposits became thicker and heavier causing some of the voids to collapse. This





**The beautiful Comal River is a direct outflow of the Edwards Aquifer.**

collapsed area or faults, created the pockets that are now part of our aquifer. The Edwards Aquifer has always been used by humans since they first arrived in the area. First by the natives, using the natural artisan springs, then as Europeans settled the area the technology of well drilling began. At first these wells were powered by the positive pressure within the aquifer that causes the natural artisan wells to flow. As time went on the drain on the aquifer became greater and this positive pressure has diminished to the point that only 2 natural springs now flow and we must now pump the water up out of the aquifer for our daily use.

**Q: What is an aquifer?**

**A:** An aquifer is defined as "An underground bed or layer of permeable rock, sediment, or soil that yields water."

**Q: What material makes up the Edwards Aquifer and how does it store water?**

**A:** The Edwards Aquifer consists of faulted and fractured carbonate limestone. There are vast networks of holey rock and lace rock (just like we use in our tanks) that hold water like the pores of a sponge. This network along with larger caverns pass water from one to another is where the water is stored.

**Q: How big and where is it?**

**A:** This is a loaded question. The easiest answer is it is about 180 miles long and 5-30 miles wide depending on location or approximately 3,600 square miles running southwest to northeast starting in Kinney county running through Uvalde, Medina, Bexar, Comal, and Hays counties to Travis county containing about 175 million acre feet of water along

along its length. This does not tell the whole story though. Along the 180 mile stretch there are vertical fractures that cut off the supply of water from one "pool" to the next. The 175 million figure is also misleading since most of the water is trapped in unusable pockets leaving a estimate of 25-55 million acre feet of "usable" water, but if we use more than 10% of this water the springs that feed the Comal and San Marcos rivers will dry up which leaves us by my math 2.5- 5.5 million acre feet of true usable water.

**Q:** What is the recharge zone and how does it work?

**A:** That is another complex question. The obvious answer is a recharge zone is an area that refills or recharges the aquifer, but the way it is done is not so obvious. Most of the aquifer is what they call "confined" which means that the overlaying material is either non-permeable or only semi-permeable. To get around this there are a couple of natural methods. We get about 10% of our recharge from natural seepage from the nearby Travis Aquifer, but the other ways are very interesting. What we call the recharge zone is actually two different areas; the contributing zone and the actual recharge zone. The contributing zone collects the run off and funnels it down to the recharge zone. When the water collected in the contributing zone flows down the streams and creeks across the recharge zone it not only flows down stream, but it also flows across and consequently down fissures in the limestone beds. If you have ever seen a creek that is flowing great then just seems to peter out and then goes dry (Cibolo creek is a good example) and wondered why, this is what has happened. Sink holes are also use to recharge the aquifer by filling with rain water which then percolates down into the aquifer. There are also millions of fissures all across the recharge zone most we would never notice. These fissures act very similar to the ones in the stream beds but the collect rain water feeding it directly down into the aquifer or into an underground cavity that then percolates down into it.

Now we have covered some of the very basics, allow me to share my thoughts with you. We are truly blessed to have such a simple yet complex and highly productive water source. It gives us its own barometer of its health even if we didn't have the J-17 well measurements. When she is healthy and at or near capacity, water flows from the San Antonio and San Pedro springs (sadly not in years) and when she is being over used we see diminished flows at

San Marcos and Comal springs. She gives us some of the cleanest water of any municipality in the world only getting chlorine added instead of going through a long and expensive purifying process. The trace mineral content and KH and pH are absolutely awesome for the fish and plants that we keep. It supports a diverse and very unique set of species that we can call our own. I am left wondering about the future of such a great and wonderful treasure. We are the 7th largest city in the U.S. With that comes many opportunities and challenges in managing this vital resource. We must all do our part in protecting it and not through over reaction but through our own responsible actions.



**The pristine waters of the Edwards Aquifer support a diverse assemblage of plant and animal life.**

Think of it this way, thanks to the wonderful hydraulics of our aquifer the next glass of water you drink may be more then 200 years old.

*Originally published in the Lateral Line, official publication of the Hill Country Cichlid Club, November, 2009.*



# My Attempts at Spawning *Betta pi*

Gerald Griffin

For those that are not Bettaphiles *Betta pi* is one of the large yellow mouthbrooders of the “waseri” complex. It is a large stocky species that reaches a length of about 5 inches with males being more slender than females. They are sexually dimorphic (which means you can tell male from female). Males have longer pelvic fins, a pointed caudal fin and longer lips. Females have a rounded abdomen and shorter fins. The species obtained its name from the Pi shaped mark on its bottom lip that resembles the Greek letter Pi and was formally named Dr. Tan in 1998.

I obtained my *Betta pi* from Victorea Earnest a little

these fish. I tried several times to obtain fry with no success at all. The rule in my fish room is that when virtually fails, give up and let the fish do what comes naturally and this usually works and I am rewarded with fry as was the case with *Betta pi*.

My first attempts were with four pair in a thirty gallon flat tank with fake plants and lots of broken flower pots. Water conditions were pH 7.6 and 160 ppm total hardness. The pairs paired off and spawned and all of the males were holding. I thought finally I would have success. Three days later all of the males had swallowed except for one which swallowed the next day. For the next few months this was the pattern, every ten days they would spawn and within three to four days all the males had swallowed.

My second set of attempts were placing pairs in standard 20 gallon tanks with HOB filters. For the first few times I would let the pair stay together and again the males would swallow their brood between days three to four. I tried removing the female on day two, males still swallowed, removing females after the spawn, males still swallowed. I tried covering the tanks after removing females and the males swallowed, covering the tanks leaving the females in and the males still swallowed. It was at this point that I decided to give it a rest and put them back into their colony tank.

My non attempt was placing them back into their 30 gallon flat tank but this time I added a lot of java moss, java fern and boiled peat moss to their tank. The water turned a nice amber brown and the water conditions changed to pH 6.4 and 120 ppm hardness. During a Oklahoma Aquarium Association meeting that I conducted at my place I pointed out the *Betta pi* to my fellow aquarists and for some reason a number of them were in awe of this species. I have talked about wild bettas for years but everyone seems to focus on the flashy smaller species. Yes there was some oowing at the al



***Betta pi* pair, male right, female left. Photo by Gerald Griffin.**

over a year ago as juveniles from her successful spawn. They do grow moderately and reach full adult size in about a year. At adult size they do begin to spawn but spawning is the easy part. For reasons still unknown the male tends to swallow the eggs at day three. Research has shown that at day three the eggs hatch and turn into wigglers and the males are hyper sensitive and almost everything spooks them to where they swallow the brood. If they do brood successfully then the male can brood for as long as 28 days. It has also been noted that wild caught males tend to brood better than captive born males. The reasons for this are still unclear.

As mentioned earlier getting *Betta pi* to spawn is not a problem, the problem was obtaining fry from

*albimarginata* tank when the males were flaring with each other but some of them their astonishment at the *Betta pi* struck me and when I questioned them about it the response was "They are so big!". For the few die hards like Pam, Victorea and I know that the waseri complex are the most intelligent and curious of the wild bettas.

*Betta pi* is not shy by any means. In fact they kind of remind me of aquatic puppy dogs. They are active and curious and in a human way they seem to play and explore. The activities I have seen resemble the activities of some of the smarter cichlids. *Betta pi* also seem to know who feeds them and when I approach their tank they are all in the front of the tank eagerly taking food and they can be hand fed and petted. As far a pet fish go *Betta pi* can be near the top of the list. One day as I was cleaning their tank I noticed fry. It



was hard to count but there was not many, only a dozen. When they were a quarter inch long they stayed clear of the adults and would snatch food after the adults were done eating. The adults did notice the fry but never once went after them or made an attempt to eat them. By the time the fry reached a size of half an inch they were right up there with the adults eating food and have remained there since. I have not noticed any further batches of fry and have noticed that the adults do not eat the fry but I am sure the juveniles will eat fry so that is probably the reason I do not have any more fry. I will shortly remove these fry for auction at the Atlanta Area Aquarium Associations February meeting which I will be speaking at. After I remove these fry I would expect to see more fry but might not so I will keep everyone posted.

So where did the fry come from? There are two possibilities there. One is that a male did hold to term that I did not notice or that some eggs were not picked up by the female when they spawned and

those eggs developed in the peat and upon hatching fed upon the organisms in the java moss until they became big enough to eat the flake food. Either way I did obtain fry and I will keep them in this setup as it is yielding results.

*Article taken from OKAA Website [www.okcaa.org](http://www.okcaa.org)*

## Upcoming Events

To have your club's event published in **Fish Tales**, submit to editor at [gsteeves@gvvc.com](mailto:gsteeves@gvvc.com) as far in advance as possible.

January 16 TCA monthly meeting 7:00 at Spring Creek Barbeque, 1509 Airport Freeway, in Bedford.

February 21st HAS Spring Auction

February 28th (ten.) HCCC Spring Auction

March 20th 2010 Auction Sponsored by USAfish-box.com, Holey Rock Of Texas, Fish Freaks Cichlids, & Vintage Aquariums. La Quinta Inn & Suites 1503 Breckenridge Road Mansfield, TX 76063

March 27th (ten.) HCCC Meeting Ryan's Steakhouse New Braunfels TX. Speaker Dr. Keith Arnold (exact meeting date depends on Dr. Arnold's availability) Firm details to follow.

May (Date TBD) HCCC Spring picnic Landa Park New Braunfels TX.

June 10th - 13th The North American Discus Association national convention in Irving, TX

July 22nd -25th ACA Annual Convention Milwaukee WI.

July 31st HCCC Meeting Ryan's Steakhouse New Braunfels TX. Speaker Dr. Anton Lamboj.

September -FOTAS, Oklahoma City OK.



## Federation of Texas Aquarium Societies

### Braz Walker Endowment Program

Braz Walker, perhaps the best known of Texas' aquarists, set a standard for contributions to this hobby that may never be surpassed. Though paralyzed from the neck down from an accident while a college student, Braz managed to keep, breed, write and photograph a number of aquarium fishes. He published articles in a number of club publications, science journals and aquarium magazines.

Shortly after his death, FOTAS created the Braz Walker Endowment Program in Aquarium Science to honor his accomplishments and as a means to carry forth some of his interests. The program, funded from interest generated by a growing corpus, involves the following:

- **SPECIAL COLLECTION OF AQUARIUM LITERATURE:** One of the earliest efforts of this program focused on accumulating books and magazines that would remain available. This collection, housed at the Sterling A. Evans Library of Texas A&M University, contains a wide variety of books that include simple, introductory ones, those related to a specific topic, and those containing scientific literature. The collection also includes large "runs" of the aquarium magazines, some back to the 1950's.
- **RESEARCH GRANTS:** On a biennial basis, FOTAS has up to \$500.00 for supporting research that enhances the aquarium hobby. Usually these grants go to university students, but eligibility varies, depending upon the proposal. To apply for the research award, submit a two- to three-page description of the project, a budget and a letter of support from an adviser to any FOTAS officer.



## Federation of Texas Aquarium Societies

### 2009 FOTAS Member Clubs

Betta Habari

Brazos Valley Aquarium Society

Dallas Killifish Association

Hill Country Cichlid Club

Houston Aquarium Society

Houston Livebearer Association

Oklahoma Aquarium Association

Texas Betta Society

Texas Cichlid Association



### Inaugural National Convention

**Irving, TX June 10-13, 2010**

HANS (DISCUS HANS) KOOPS  
OF STENDKER DISCUS USA

WAYNE NG  
JACK WATTLEY  
JOHN NICHOLSON

Registration Information:  
<http://www.discus2010.com/>



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**FOTAS ON THE WEB!**  
**WWW.FOTASWEBSITE.COM**

## Brazos Walker Special Collection of Aquarium Literature Additions

Donated by Gwen and Steve Butler of Bryan, Texas  
[former members of BVAS]

- Axelrod, H. R. 1971. Breeding Aquarium Fishes. Book 2. T.F.H. Publications, Neptune, N.J. H-941.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 1980. Tropical Fish. T.F.H. Publications, Neptune, N.J. KW-020.
- \_\_\_\_\_ & W. Burgess. 1980. Tropical fish in Your Home, Revised edition. Sterling Publiing, New York.
- \_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_. 1988. African Cichlids of Lakes Malawi and Tanganyika. 12th edition. T.F.H. Publications, Neptune, N.J. PS-703.
- \_\_\_\_\_ & L. P. Schultz. 1983. Handbook of Tropical Aquarium Fishes, Revised edition. T.F.H. Publications, Neptune, N.J. PS-663.
- \_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_. 1990. Handbook of Tropical Aquarium Fishes, Revised edition. T.F.H. Publications, Neptune, N.J. PS-663.
- \_\_\_\_\_ & M. E. Sweeney. 1992. The Fascination of Breeding Aquarium Fish. T.F.H. Publications, Neptune, N.J. TS-185.
- Burgess, W. E. 1989. An Atlas of Freshwater and Marine Catfishes. T.F.H. Publications, Neptune, N.J. H-1097.
- Pronek, N. 1982. Oscars. T.F.H. Publications, Neptune, N.J. PS-687.
- Terceira, A. C. 1974. Killifish, Their Care and Breeding. Pices Publishing Corp., Norwalk, CT.
- Wischnath, L. 1993. Atlas of Livebearers of the World. T.F.H. Publishing, Neptune, N.J.

The special collections are now in the Cushing Memorial Library at Texas A&M University, adjacent to the Sterling A. Evans Library. Eventually they will be formally moved into the Braz Walker collection. (3-4 weeks from June 25th).

**FOTAS ON THE WEB!**  
**WWW.FOTASWEBSITE.COM**

## A Visit with John Hansen

Rick Borstein

Although I am traveling much less due to the economy, I still get the chance to get out and about. It's not everyday that I find myself in Arkansas. I was asked to speak at a conference (work related) in Hot Springs, Arkansas. I remembered that John Hansen, a recent speaker at one of our meetings, lived in the state. A quick Googling and I found out that he lived only fifteen minutes from my hotel.

I quickly called John and invited myself to see his fishroom...around my neighborhood they call that "Chutzpah" which is Yiddish for "nervy". Fortunately he was kind enough to say "come on down".

### About John Hansen

John Hansen is a hobby old-timer. For many years he ran pet stores in the Denver area. Unlike many stores, he also bred fish, mainly peacocks (*Aulonocara* sp.) and did well with his business.

John has been active in the American Cichlid Association for many years. He is the fish farm liaison and has been responsible for securing thousands of dollars in donations. The donations are auctioned off at the annual ACA conventions to worthy causes such as the Guy Jordan Cichlid Research Fund and the Paul V. Loiselle Cichlid Conservation Fund.

He retired to Arkansas a few years ago and built a beautiful home on a few acres. Of course he also built a big fish house.

### John's Fish House

John has a very big combination fish house—greenhouse with a couple of hundred tanks, numerous 300 gallon vats, and other indoor ponds.

The economy has hurt his wholesaling business, especially the cichlids, so he is concentrating on catfish. He has at least 100 tanks full of various types

of *Ancistrus* including standard, long fin, albino and more.

All his tanks are drilled and plumbed and look great. John is well known for his peacocks and I got to see several huge 300 gallon vats, each dedicated to a species or color morph. His *Aulonocara* sp. "Iwanda" were a gorgeous blue and yellow. The fish I had to take back with me were *Aulonocara stuartgranti* "bicolor 500", a really attractive "stuartgranti" type. Males are overall a regal blue with yellow-orange shoulder markings. I got to pick the best looking male from about 20 fish in the vat!

I also picked up six calico bristlenose plecos which look quite a bit different from the spotted bristlenose that I currently keep!



The fish house is attached to the greenhouse which contained huge vats of koi. John also cultivated full sized banana trees.

*Rick Borstein is currently president of the Federation of American Aquarium Societies and an active member in the Greater Chicago Cichlid Association. This article originally appeared in the July/August issue of Cichlid Chatter, the official publication of the Greater Chicago Cichlid Association.*



*Aulonocara stuartgranti* "bicolor 500".



# Show Judging and the Texas Fish Judges Registry

Dan Martin

*Editors note—As F.O.T.A.S. is evolving, many forgotten or unused programs are being revisited and resurrected. The reformation of a centralized show judging committee is being considered. Interested prospective F.O.T.A.S. judges can contact President Marvin England at [marvinengland@hotmail.com](mailto:marvinengland@hotmail.com). With this in mind we reprint Dan Martin's excellent 2003 article on the subject.*

Shows are a good way to entice new members to join an organization. Sadly, because of the extra work involved and the insurance requirements of most facilities where such an event could be held, shows within Texas have become very rare. The Houston Aquarium Society even

ran "home shows" (judges traveled to entrants homes, judged and video taped the entries and award ceremonies were held at local restaurants) for several years. Society members seem to have little time or interest in anything longer than a weekend. At one time mall shows of a couple of weeks were the norm for fish clubs, rock and gem clubs, car clubs, and art competitions. It's hard to believe now but clubs used to be paid to hold such events at malls to increase foot traffic and visitors at these facilities.

Multiple clubs could hold joint events using specialty judges for each category. Pond and garden clubs combined with an aquarium society would be a fairly normal association. In some climates koi and goldfish events would be held outside and aquarium

related competition would be held inside. Of course, combined events require more planning, co-operation, and co-ordination... more people... more time... I could go on but you get the point.

These shows still take place despite whatever conflicts and difficulties. I admire the people with the courage and determination to take this on. TCA's Spring Seminar, taking place in Arlington April 16th through the 18th will include a show. HAS, as well as many other aquarium societies use "tank beautiful" shows instead of "species" shows. The distinction?? Tank beautiful competition uses decorated tanks like



**A row of tanks at the GCCA's Cichlid Classic Show May, 2009.**

most people would want in their home vs. bare tanks with only a sponge filter or a box filter. The thought process is that a newbie seeing a tank beautiful show would be more likely to want to recreate that tank at home. Unlike HAS's shows TCA's is primarily cichlids. While other classes are offered and judged the emphasis is on 1. Asian, Central, and South American cichlids 2. Lake Malawi and Lake Victorian cichlids 3. Lake Tanganian and other African cichlids.

Before launching into the judging process or deviances I'll give a short picture of my background. I've been keeping fish or working within aquaculture or the aquarium industry since 1967. I've owned a tropical fish store, managed several, including full-line pets shops, and designed several



**The showroom at FOTAS 2005 hosted by Brazos Valley Aquarium Society.**

or deviances I'll give a short picture of my background. I've been keeping fish or working within aquaculture or the aquarium industry since 1967. I've owned a tropical fish store, managed several, including full-line pets shops, and designed several others. Right now I'm the general manager of Neptune's Garden in Houston, a store I designed and built. My interests include but are not limited to koi and goldfish, saltwater, livebearers, killies, and cichlids. I'm a life member of the American Cichlid Association (ACA) and a member of TCA. I'm also a member of the Texas Fish Judges Registry and have been involved in judging in Southern California, Florida, Tennessee, and Texas. For a short time I was involved with the judges committee of the Federation Of American Aquarium Societies (FAAS) I'm mentioning all of this to give you an indication that I've worked with organizations of varying specialties and guidelines using multiple judging methods. I'm not always right but I will stick around to defend my judgment with the individuals that cared enough to enter a show and answer judging questions.

I've been asked about FOTAS rules. FOTAS HAS NO RULES. FOTAS publishes guidelines for clubs to use as a starting point for whatever rules they choose to adopt. Maybe a basic understanding of FOTAS is needed for understanding. FOTAS, the Federation of Texas Aquarium Societies, is an organization formed to centralize assets (people, money, information) and make these assets available to member clubs and individuals wishing to form a fish club so they don't have to start from scratch. Organizational structures, by-laws, insurance, meetings, membership, publications, speakers, and spe-

cial events are intimidating to even an established organization. These topics would seem insurmountable to newcomers without some form of assistance. Of course, some clubs come and go within Texas without even knowing these assets are available or choosing to go it alone.

So the guidelines are available for clubs to adopt or deviate as they see fit. Specialties are highlighted. General categories are eliminated or expanded determined by the interests and direction of the clubs officers and membership. Rules are the responsibility of the club's show committee. Disclaimers normally state "decisions of the judges are final" that should instead read "decisions verified by the show committee are final." I've judged shows using point systems where the points were added incorrectly and the judges blamed for an obvious inequity only to find out after the show that the wrong person was declared the winner. This is the exception obviously but things like this do happen.

Judges: Some are really good, some are not. Certain



**A small portion of the huge showroom at ACA 2005 hosted by the Texas Cichlid Association and held in Fort Worth, Texas.**

standards should be maintained. Most judges try to stay within their expertise unless pressed into service by the show committee. A lot of stuff goes on behind the scenes that are not easily evident to competitors. References should be made available to the judges, sometimes provided by competitors, anticipating lack of knowledge about new species, an unusual color morph, or exceptional specimens. These items should be made known to the show committee



behind the scenes that are not easily evident to competitors. References should be made available to the judges, sometimes provided by competitors, anticipating lack of knowledge about new species, an unusual color morph, or exceptional specimens. These items should be made known to the show committee and they should communicate this to the judges. Reference publications should be recent with rare exceptions.

Now that I've added all the disclaimers I can think of at this time, here's how things normally go:

#### Scenario #1

Multiple judges, fairly large show, some huge closely contested classes, some classes with just enough entries to qualify a ribbon. The judges get together and pick a head judge. The head judge then passes out the entries of various classes to individual judges. Variant #1. The show committee has predetermined judges for certain classes for whatever reason. ( a speaker? a local icon? a non-entrant expert? ) The rest... point and shoot or judges pressed into service.

#### Scenario #2

A couple of judges, each judge all entries. Winners of classes, when determined, are listed and then judged for best in show or special awards. This is the best scenario but only works for small shows or when there's plenty of time for judging. Extra judges help for larger shows but complicate the selection of best in show. When the showroom is locked but seminar participants or entrants are milling around in the hallway clamoring to be let in to view the tanks and possibly learn the winners, things get a little hectic.

#### Scenario #3

This is absolutely the worst situation. A specialty show where the best qualified judges are also entrants either in classes they're best qualified to judge or other classes. The problem?? They're in the room and equitable judging becomes even more difficult than the norm. Ego enters the picture and in practically every case something regrettable is said or done by somebody. As hard as it is to believe

I've seen rifts created at shows that have splintered clubs.

If you've just been skimming this article until this point start reading now.

The FASTEST way to judge a show is to check out the entire class and then just pick the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd places. The BEST way to judge a show is to point compared to a "perfect" tank or fish. Subtract for obvious flaws.

To prepare for a show... What type of show is it?? Tank beautiful? A species competition?

For a tank beautiful show you provide the tank and often the stand. The tank needs to be clean. Duh. Inside and out. Just draining the tank and transporting it to the site doesn't mean you'll win. Oh, you might, but it'll be harder. Decorations for theme or in some cases artificial (plastic plants) or natural (live plants) classes need to be selected and cleaned or pruned. All materials and fish need to be transported and set-up to look well-established but immaculate. The fish need to be properly chosen for compatibility and size. A tank that elicits WOW! stands a good chance in such a competition. Fish entered in species competition in a tank beautiful normally color better and point better than in a bare tank.

For a species show using bare tanks you need to be even more prepared. Fish shown in a bare tank normally wouldn't show good color or have the proper attitude (deportment) unless properly conditioned previous to the show. Show "pros" even go to the extreme of setting the fish up in a similar situation at home for weeks before the show. Bringing your own water from home and an established sponge filter for each of your entries may even the playing field. Some entrants request two tanks next to each other placing a female in one and the entry male in the other. Usually only the male is entered so only the male is judged. Such tips used by the "pros" could

could be the difference in tightly contested classes.

Remember that the fish need to be transported in a manner that would not tear or mangle fins. Remember also that such tears are more evident on large fish than on a smaller fish. I have to admit a bias. Because of the inherent risk in moving a larger fish, small tears in the large fish are, or should be, either ignored or pointed differently than a smaller fish. In a competition for best in show between a large specimen vs. a small specimen with equal flaws, the larger fish should win in my opinion.



**The grand showroom at ACA 2005 Fort Worth Texas.**

Another note

when discussing size of fish in a show. Some fish grow larger in an aquarium than in the wild. Lake Malawi cichlids, for instance, when too large to fit crevices between the rocks are eaten by predators. I normally ask the show committee if they want me to slant my decisions in either direction. Red or white fish are not the norm in the wild but are highly prized as aquarium fish. Imagine a show where a brownish-gray red devil won over a orangish-red specimen of equal size. What would you think?

Working in a store environment I catch a lot of flak for having hybrid fish for sale. Until you've had ACA honchos yelling "get the bleach" in your store you've yet to experience everything. Rather than get into such a discussion here I'll remind you that there are only about three species of discus, and about as many species of angelfish in the wild. Red sword-tails are not found in the wild and "ditch" mollies don't sell well. Selected breeding is apparently only

selectively okay.???? I'll let the show committee choose to appease whomever they select. I get testy when someone says they speak for ALL cichlid fanciers on the subject though. Okay Eric??

If you're interested in becoming a certified judge in the Texas Fish Judges Registry you'll need to do

some apprentice judging at shows several times. You'll be handed the same judging sheets used by the other judges and have your sheets compared with their sheets to evaluate the differences. We're just trying to establish a consistency within the group. As in everything else

it's easier with more experience. It's not unlikely that many of you are just as good as the existing certified judges. If so, the process will go quickly.

It's unlikely that every entrant will agree with the judges. Welcome to the real world. FOTAS judging guidelines are available to member clubs and members of those clubs. Your show committee can make them available to you.



**Federation of Texas  
Aquarium Societies**





## My Experiences with *Benitochromis nigrodorsalis*, Lamboj 2001

Duc Nguyen

*Benitochromis nigrodorsalis* are from the West Cameroon area in Africa. More specifically, they are in the coastal areas from the foot of Mount Cameroon to the regions surrounding Duala and possibly Fernando Pool (Lamboj, 2004). *B. nigrodorsalis* exhibit beautiful coloration. In general, body coloration is a light to dark brown with subtle green. Both males and females have a rosy pink belly but during spawning, this intensifies in females. Males can reach lengths of 12cm and females slightly smaller than that. Other than size, sexual dimorphism is very subtle in this species.

I have attempted to keep this species a number of times over the past few years. I have gotten pairs before but they never spawned and typically showed very high aggression towards one another. I think one of the most challenging aspects of successfully spawning this species is in getting a compatible pair. These fish form monogamous pair bonds so aggression against other conspecifics will be very high. About two years ago, I decided that I would try one last time and was able to get a pair. At the time, I was limited with tank space so had to place the pair in a 29 gallon. When they were housed there, the pair seemed to be peaceful but on occa-

sion, the male would be extremely rough with the female and on several days, I would see the female forced into the corner of the tank; however, on other days, they seemed to get along great. At this point, I was not sure if I had a compatible pair or not. This past October 2009, I was able to move my tanks into the garage and was able to get this pair into their own 55 gallon. The tank has a sandy substrate and I placed numerous caves as well as *Anubias* plants to help them feel at home. The temperature is kept around 72F and the pH was 8.2. I fed them frozen brine shrimp, varied cichlid



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***Benitochromis nigrodorsalis* female.**

kept around 72F and the pH was 8.2. I fed them frozen brine shrimp, varied cichlid flakes and spirulina flakes. These fish are not picky eaters. After a few months, I noticed that the aggression level between them was nonexistent and the color in the female intensified as well as a visible spawning tube (ovipositor). One afternoon, I was lucky enough to witness the actual spawning! The female deposited approximately 20 or so eggs on a quahog shell I had placed in there. The male followed in fertilizing the eggs. At this point, the female picked up all the eggs



***Benitochromis nigrodorsalis* male.**

in her buccal cavity. Another interesting aspect about this species is that they are biparental mouthbrooders! Although the female had initially picked up the eggs, the pair would swap mouthbrooding duties with each other. I never got lucky enough to see the actual swap, but I could see that it was occurring multiple times on any given day. Sometimes I would see the female holding and then later in the

day, the male would. Whichever parent was not holding was able to feed and the pair was almost always together. The fish typically incubate the eggs for 10 – 12 days (Lamboj, 2004).

However, in my tank, they released at day 20 (I'm thinking this is so because of the water temperature). When the fry were released, again, both parents participated in brood care. I noticed that they would pick up the fry in the evenings when I turned the tank lights off or when they suspect danger approaching. As I am writing this article, the parents are still protecting their young. Brood care continues for up to two months (Lamboj, 2004).

In conclusion, I would have to say that *B. nigrodorsalis* would be ranked on top of my favorites. They



***Benitochromis nigrodorsalis* female guarding fry.**

are extremely interesting in behavior and not too difficult to keep – keeping in mind that you want to get a compatible pair. These fish are available occasionally from specialty shops so please give them a try! They are a must-have for any cichlid enthusiast!

#### References:

**Lamboj, Anton;** 2004; "The Cichlid Fishes of Western Africa"; *Birgit Schmettkamp Verlag*; pp. 1-255.

*Duc is a well known Texas aquarist with a wide range of aquatic interests. As a Hill Country Cichlid Club charter member, A Texas Cichlid Association member and member of the Texas Betta Society, you are sure to find him frequenting some event around the state.*



# **Federation of Texas Aquarium Societies**

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