

modern AQUARIUM



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Greater City Aquarium Society - New York

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Series III Vol. XXVII, No. 7 September, 2020

ON THE COVER

Our cover photo this month features a pair of shell dwellers from Lake Tanganyika, *Neolamprologus similis*. For more on these beautiful little fish see Jules Birnbaum's article on page 7.

Photo by Jules Birnbaum

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From the Editor

by Dan Radebaugh

So here we still abide, fishkeeping in a time of plague. The medical situation aside, those of us with significant breeding programs are surely the most adversely affected. What to do with all those fry? I know a few of you have been able to find ways to distribute the little ones, and even to make contributions to the club from the revenue. Medically, I haven't heard of any of our members being directly affected—hopefully that trend will continue. To borrow a line from an old cop show, “Be careful out there!”

We can of course continue to read (and write!) articles about our fishes, and our authors have admirably held up their end so far! This issue is a good example. If you're as bored as I have been lately with finding nothing on TV that I haven't already seen at least 20 times, think about using some of that excess TV time to sit down and write the article you briefly considered last year! Believe me—we'd all *love* to take the time to read it!

Following up on Joe Ferdenzi's “fishkeeping in the movies” article last month, in this issue our MA CLASSICS choice is also based on a movie. In this case we reprise a story of Joe's from the May 1999 issue of **Modern Aquarium**, “The Dragon Murder Case Revisited.” If murder isn't distressing enough for you, Steve Sica tells us about his adventures with (or in?) “Damsel Distress.” On a less stressful note, Joe Graffagnino tells us about his adventures breeding *Hypsolebias mediopapillatus*, and Jules Birnbaum talks about his adventures with *Neolamprologus similis* in “My Shell Dwellers from Lake Tanganyika.”

Jeremy Wade has been the featured speaker on the subject of fishes in several TV series on **Animal**



Planet and **Discovery** over the past several years. While these series have not specifically been about the aquarium hobby or fishkeeping, I have reviewed several of them over the years. Though his new show, **Mysteries of the Deep**, is not particularly about fish, I thought it appropriate to review his new series, just to keep up with his TV evolution.

Our exchange article this month is “*Apistogramma Rubrolineata*,” by Don Kinyon from **Tank Tales**, published by the Aquarium Club of Lancaster County. The Undergravel Reporter tells us about the “Ultra-black” coloration of some 16 species of deep sea fish. Who knew? The issue closes with the FIN FUN puzzle, “The Aquatic Gardener.”

Stay Safe! Write an article!





GCAS Programs

2020

It is our great fortune to have another admirable cast of speakers who have so graciously accepted our invitation to join us throughout the coming season, bringing us their extensive knowledge and experiences. You certainly won't wish to miss a moment of our prominent guests, not to mention the friends, fish, warmth, and camaraderie that accompany each meeting.

March 4	Joseph Ferdenzi <i>Aquascaping</i>
April 1	Meeting Cancelled <i>Covid-19</i>
May 6	Lawrence Kent <i>Holy Grail Cichlids, Friends, and Other Fish: Two West African Stories</i>
June 3	Pam Chin <i>Swimming With Cichlids - Zambia</i>
July 2	Lawrence Flint <i>Reef Aquarium Systems in Schools</i>
August 6	Stephen Chester <i>The Aquarium Hobby in the UK</i>
September 2	TBA
October 7	Larry Johnson <i>TBA</i>
November 4	TBA
December 2	Holiday Party!

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The Greater City Aquarium Society meets every month except January and February. Members receive notice of meetings in the mail or by email. For more information, contact: Dan Radebaugh at (718) 458-8437, email gcas@earthlink.net, or fax to (347) 379-4984. For more information about our club or to see previous issues of **Modern Aquarium**, you can also go to our Internet Home Page at <http://www.greatercity.net>, <http://www.greatercity.org>, or <http://www.greatercity.com>.

President's Message

by Horst Gerber

After months of being shut down, on July 28 the Zoos and Botanical Gardens have opened their gates to the general public, but it's still a different environment than we were accustomed to in the good old days before the virus. First, there are now mostly only outside exhibits, with a reduced number of visitors. Face masks are required, along with strictly enforced social distancing protocols. Anyone not complying will be fed to the lions! That should save the Zoo a pretty penny! At the Botanical Garden we just don't have large enough carnivorous plants—Audrey has not arrived yet (see **Little Shop of Horrors**).

Your Board members have been chomping at the bit to get back to the Garden. Alas, that will not happen for a while. There are just too many of us to fit into our usual space, and even if the space were larger I doubt that having us all there, doing auctions, listening to speakers, and just generally socializing would safely work. Hopefully we will see development of an effective vaccine(s) in time for us to be able to live a more familiar life in the new year. We are really looking forward to seeing all of you in good health!

Observing my friends during this odd era has been quite an experience. Different, unexpected personality traits have emerged in many. I must say though, that staying occupied with our fish seems to have kept most of us at least half sane. There is of course no scientific proof of this, but I wonder if our hobby hasn't protected a lot of us from the virus. After all, look how much time we spend with our hands in water tinkering with our fish tanks. The average person touches his (or her) face about twenty times per hour. It seems to me that keeping our hands in water the way we do would: *a*) keep the virus off our hands so that we wouldn't transmit it to ourselves when we touch our face, and *b*) keep us too busy to go outside and get into trouble!

I have to say that for the past several months I have not really been writing a 'President's Message' for the club. Rather it seems I'm writing a monthly update on the Corona virus, and if I say or hear the phrase "this is the new normal" one more time I may begin projectile vomiting! There seems to be no escape! This is all you hear or read about on radio, TV, newspapers, magazines, etc. Even sports have been pre-empted!

I grew up as a widow's son in the suburbs of Hamburg during the war. My father was killed in Russia. If you think that must have been tough, well back then it rather seemed normal to us kids. Half my classmates were in the same position as I. This current situation seems like an extension of those war years. Mercifully, the death rate now is only 1 to 2 per cent, whereas in the war years half of the German male population did not return home.

As aquarists we can count our blessings—we have been lucky! Our hobby can occupy quite a chunk of time as we putter around in our tanks. What used to be a two-day weekend seems to have been replaced overnight by an endless Sunday, with nowhere to go and nothing to do. Many friends have caught up on their work and their projects. With my sciatic nerve problem however, I have been able to do little in the way of catching up. For all of us in this "time of plague," most of our time has been spent at home doing not much. This has of course by itself created challenges. So I think we should count our blessings, that we have this hobby to give us at least some challenges to both mind and body. We are really looking forward to seeing all of you in good health!

Stay Well!

Horst





GCAS Thanks You!

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An Aquarist's Journey

Rosario La Corte is one of the world's leading authorities on breeding fish and he has written numerous articles and books, contributing greatly to our understanding of fish and their habits.

Now, for the first time, here is a compilation of his travels, adventures, successes (and, very occasional failures) all relating to collecting, keeping, and breeding fish, and in his own words (and edited by *Modern Aquarium's* Editor, Dan Radebaugh).

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MY SHELL DWELLERS FROM LAKE TANGANYIKA

Story and Photos by Jules Birnbaum



After being in the hobby for over 70 years I recently acquired a few *Neolamprologus similis* for the first time. Warren Feuer had given a GCAS presentation on these interesting little fish, which I found to be very appealing. I don't even remember how they got into my fishroom.

These little fish, usually around 2", look just like the bigger fish from Lake Tanganyika in Africa. They are among the smallest of cichlids, and are found all around the rocky shores of the lake. The name *Neolamprologus* translates to something like new, large, bright eye. And as the title of this article implies, they are shell dwellers.

I've kept the larger *Julidochromis marlieri* in the same tank with them without a problem. The shells are used as homes—for protection and for breeding. Escargot shells will also do, as will almost any small, pretty shell. Large shells are not favored by these fish, because they don't offer the protection from predators that these fish little require. The female lays the eggs in the shell, and the male stays outside the shell to protect the home. One of the very interesting features of this fish is that if the tank is large enough they will form several colonies in the same tank.

Since I had a spare 30 gallon (long) tank, in they went with some crushed coral and a few shells that I ordered from a Florida shell seller. Our Long Island

water pH is about 7, and the crushed coral brings it up to about 8 or more. I also have placed a piece of coral in the tank which helps raise the pH to the degree they require. The shell dwellers also rearrange the crushed coral for more privacy.

My first shell dweller was the *Neolamprologus similis*, which is a good choice for beginners. The fish has black stripes running vertically down the body. They are similar to their cousins the *N. multifasciatus*. Since there are few if any local auctions around because of Covid-19, a good source to purchase them from is WetSpot or Sand City Cichlids. However, there are several other online vendors that occasionally have them available. The cost is generally 11 to 14 dollars for each juvenile. I would order at least 6 to assure that you get a pair.

I fed the *similis* small, high protein pellets in the morning and brine shrimp at night. I did not pay much attention to them other than a weekly 60% water change. The water temperature was about 78 degrees F. There were no plants in the tank and the lighting was subdued. Filtration was provided by two SwissTropicals sponge filters, one at each end of the tank.

After several months I saw a larger *similis* (the male) guarding a shell, and a few days later a few fry appeared. Spawns are usually small. I decided to line

the whole tank bottom with additional small shells. Today, years later, I have a number of colonies, and estimate there to be 80 *N. similis* in this tank. They seem to handle the high bio-load well, given weekly 70% water changes. I've sold over 50 for the benefit of GCAS, but the fry keep coming.

Getting them out of their shells can be tricky. Using a 2 gallon pail, I suspend a piece of egg crate just above 4" of water. I place the shells on the egg crate, and overnight the shell dwellers drop down into the water and do not go back up to their shells.

I recently decided to try several other species (there are approximately 24 species of shell dwellers), and converted four other tanks to house these interesting little fish. I even purchased a large poster, which I framed, showing many of the different Lake Tanganyika shell dwellers.

I set up several other tanks, and then purchased five different shell dweller species, eight juveniles each, hoping to get at least one pair of each species. So far I'm just growing out the juveniles. I suggest going online to see some great pictures. Sand City Cichlids, in Ohio, and WetSpot, on the West coast, are good sources for African shell dwellers. Sand City also sells shells, and JEHMCO or Ken's Fish sells 20-pound bags of crushed coral. This substrate should be washed thoroughly, or you will have cloudy water.



Snail shells destined for the tank.

If you have a spare 10 gallon or larger tank try a shell dweller. You will not be disappointed!



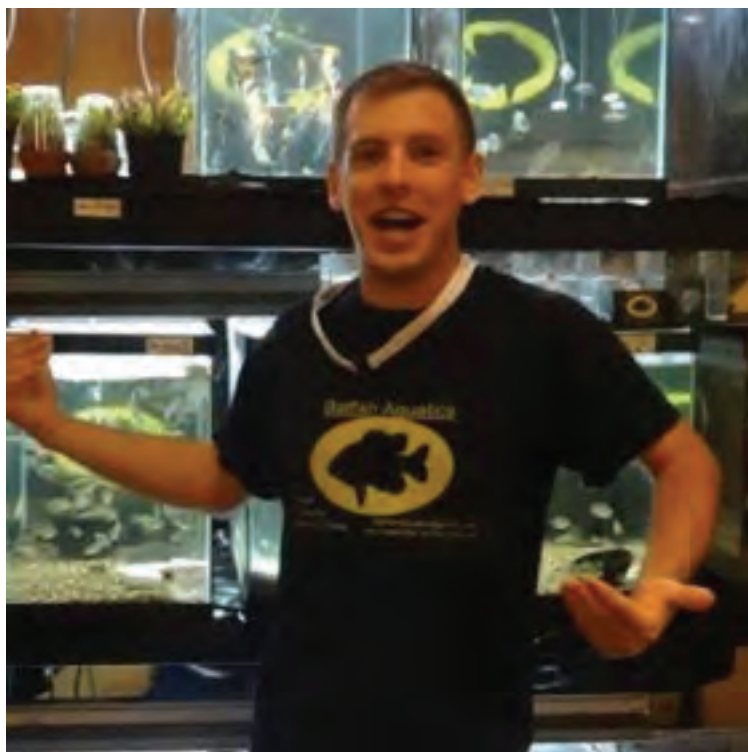
SEPTEMBER'S SPEAKER

Joshua Wiegert

is a well known aquarist, speaker, and author. He currently pens the "Bottom of the Tank" column in Tropical Fish Hobbyist. He has had featured articles in many magazines, and has travelled throughout the U.S. and beyond, speaking at various aquarium clubs. His topic Thursday night at 7:30 will be Loricarids for the Planted Aquarium. Link is below.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rAZ1skxapxM>



My Damsel Distress

Story and Photos by Stephen Sica



A profile view of a juvenile Longfin damselfish, *Stegastes diencaeus*. It's difficult to believe, but this brightly colored fish changes from its beautiful and bright juvenile colors to a drab dark brown or almost black as an adult.

One of my favorite underwater interests is photographing fish and reef animals. There are similar fish, corals and creatures that I observe on almost every dive in Florida or the Caribbean. You may think that this would become boring after a while, but the physical sensation and joy of being underwater is something that is difficult to describe. You either like it or you don't.

A few years ago a coworker and friend of Donna was planning to visit someone in Bali, and wanted to learn to dive for this exotic adventure. She took lessons and became certified. She made one or two supervised dives during her trip, and upon her return home she promptly "hung up her fins." She intends to try it again someday, but you know how it is.

It is not always easy to photograph fish that I see all the time. I am often unable to photograph most of them, for all sorts of reasons that I may have mentioned during the past twenty years or so. But I especially enjoy photographing, or perhaps I should say attempting to photograph, extremely small animals. I find tiny creatures fascinating. Unfortunately, you have to get very close and have good underwater vision. Donna sees almost everything, while I do not. This does not help the process. When you approach almost any animal, and especially a small one, you automatically set off its urge to flee. I have been trying to photograph all sorts of these small living entities for years. Every now and then I succeed.

One of my favorite subjects all these years has been a fast-swimming small yellow fish with either a purple or bluish upper head and body. They always swim among rocks and corals that are rife with hiding places. I would plant myself stationary and motionless near a group of these independently swimming fish. There could be five or six together, or even many more, but they are not schooling fish. They just happen to share the same piece of rock or coral. When I try to photograph one, it zips into a hole and either stays there or swims out the opposite side. I'll aim my camera at one, causing it to disappear into its hole. Next, I swim to the other side of the rock expecting it to exit, but these fish are so small and smart that they usually stay put while I am foolishly waiting. I have been embarrassed many times as I watch my human dive buddies swim off into the blue haze while I wind up with (fish?) egg on my face. I have lost myself from my dive companions many times. They lose patience while I'm trying to photograph a fish. This is not good in a strange locale or poor visibility where it's easy to get lost, and I have been lost at times. How's that for a panic attack?

Last October while in Key Largo, I decided to have another try at these small fish, because the water wasn't very clear and there were so many of them swimming about the reefs—more than usual, it seemed to me. The water was warm, and there had been no early hurricanes or tropical storms, so maybe



This camera-facing juvenile Longfin damselfish is slightly out of focus, but you can clearly see the dark marking near the rear of its dorsal fin. This spot identifies the fish from similar family member juveniles, such as the Cocoa damselfish, *Stegastes variabilis*, and the Beaugregory, *Stegastes leucostictus*.

it was a good year for hatchlings. Back home, I had recently researched these fish and learned that they are juveniles in the damselfish family. For some reason that I cannot explain, I never bothered to learn about these fish in their juvenile and early phases. I'm not sure why, because I do like to look up things. Perhaps it was because I had taken so many photos and would delete them seeing that the fish were too fast and blurry. These juvenile fish just never swim in place; they are always on the move. Makes sense—no?

During our two diving days last autumn, I came across a dozen or so flitting about a rock outcropping. Most were in the one inch length range, but a few were just over two inches, so I decided to challenge these frisky little fish one more time. I picked out a fish, swam towards it and hovered motionless. It swam into the rocks, so I took a modest breath and held it. Breathing and photography aren't complementary at times. Bubbles frighten most fish, and a deep breath would make me too buoyant and I would just float up and away. (I'm sure that this would please the fish.) Breath holding is something that you **never** do while breathing compressed air under pressure (at any depth more than two or three feet).

Throughout two days, I took photos whenever I had the opportunity. These fish remained uncooperative, so I just took as many photos as I



A head-on view of a juvenile Longfin damselfish shows a rather small, insignificant animal in a vast ocean. Ironically, when we see an attractive fish such as this in our small home aquarium, its beauty is magnified, as well as startling.



This two-inch Longfin damselfish, *Stegastes diencaeus*, prefers coral and rock reef structures laden with tunnels and other hiding places. When approached, it quickly disappears into a crevice to either seek another exit point or stay in hiding.

could manage. When we got home in late October, Donna's birthday and the end of the year holidays were fast approaching, so I forgot about photos and fish. It wasn't until I was writing about Key Largo a few weeks ago that I discovered my one good photograph and decided to research the fish further. It turned out to be a juvenile Longfin damselfish, *Stegastes diencaeus*. I didn't bother to see if I had a



A juvenile Longfin damselfish, *Stegastes diencaeus*, is a member of the Damselfish family. Juveniles have blue lines and spots on the head and back, and a dark spot near the base of the dorsal fin. An adult grows to four inches but becomes a bland dark brown to black. An average juvenile is about two inches.

photo of an adult because it is usually charcoal gray or black, although some may be dark brown. I think that it is a plain looking "colorless" fish, so I'm fairly sure that I never tried to photograph one. It grows to three to four inches, and it is difficult to distinguish it from other similar damselfish. Like the Sergeant major, *Abudefduf saxatilis*, and other damselfishes, it is territorial, pugnacious and aggressive towards divers who enter its territories.

Let me state for the record that now that I know exactly what it is, I'll be on the lookout for a nice adult specimen to add to my computer collection of photographs. Of course finding that special picture when you need it can be an adventure in itself!



Hypsolebias mediopapillatus

“Pindias”

by Joseph Graffagnino

My friend Harry Faustmann is my main contact for killifish, especially annuals. He contacted me that he had extra *Hypsolebias mediopapillatus* “Pindias” and asked if I wanted to try them. I rarely turn Harry down, because his killies are spectacular. At the next Greater City Aquarium Society meeting he brought me a bag containing two pairs of these peat-spawning little beauties.

I took them home and placed them in a 10-gallon tank. The water temperature was 75 degrees with a pH of 6.5. I generally use wonton soup pint containers, but I thought this particular species would do better with a deeper pot and additional peat, so I exchanged the plastic container with a 6-inch flower pot. I fed the killies frozen bloodworms or live blackworms daily. I perform weekly water changes of 25%.

After a month I took the peat out of the clay pot, used newspaper to remove most of the wetness until the peat was just slightly moist. The peat moss should be moist enough to feel wet to the touch, but not wet enough to allow water to drip when squeezed. I then placed the peat, hopefully with killi eggs in it, in a plastic fish bag. Many killi keepers use styrofoam boxes to hold the egg bags for consistency in temperature and humidity. I labeled the name of the species and date collected, and stored it in a crawl space in my basement. This is the coolest part of the house, and it stays around 70 degrees Fahrenheit. This species requires a minimum of three months for the eggs to incubate and the embryos to mature. I let them stay for four months, because previously I had tried to hatch the eggs in three months with poor results. On the fourth attempt at collecting the peat and storing the eggs it worked; previously nothing had hatched. When I added the peat to a small plastic container with water from the parents’ tank I saw 50-60 babies pop their heads up and swim within 24 hours.

It’s important to get the babies out of the original peat they were hatched in, because if left in that environment they often get *oodinium*. The hobbyist can’t see the *oodinium* on the babies because they are too small and the fry die off fast. *Oodinium* is a genus of parasitic dinoflagellates. Their hosts are saltwater and

freshwater fish, causing a type of ‘velvet’ disease (also called gold dust disease). The host typically develops a yellow or gold ‘dust’ scattered on its head, fins, and body. At this stage, the infestation is already severe.

I moved the fry into a 10-gallon tank, half-filled

with water from the parents’ tank. The aquarium was bare bottom with only a small sponge filter. The water temperature was 75 degrees Fahrenheit and the pH was 6.5. The fry were large enough to take newly hatched brine shrimp and frozen brine shrimp when live food was not available. They grew quickly. Daily water changes of 10%

kept down the nitrates and ammonia levels (from rotting food and fish waste). Frequent partial water changes enable killi babies to grow faster. After a few months I was able to share the babies with the other local clubs that I belong to. It’s good to share your successful spawns.

The species *Hypsolebias mediopapillatus* was recently discovered by Costa in 2006 (as *Simpsonichthys mediopapillatus*). Costa renamed it *Hypsolebias mediopapillatus* in 2016. This species comes from northeastern Brazil and is found in the Rio Sao Domingos drainage. If you are looking for a new annual “peat spawner” killi, I suggest you try these little beauties.



References:

My notes
Wikipedia for *oodinium* definition
Brooklyn Aquarium Society “The Best of Killie Forum” by Michael Rosenthal



Fishy Friends' Photos

by Greater City Aquarium Society Fishy Friends

***B**elow are photo submissions to our “Fishy Friends” Facebook group. I’ve left the subjects unnamed, but not the photographer. If you see a shot you like, and want more info, ask the photographer about it! I’m sure he or she will be delighted to tell you!*



Apistogramma Rubrolineata

Collecting, Keeping, and Spawning This Wild Apisto from the Madre de Dios

by Don Kinyon

One of the biggest thrills for many aquarists is a chance to head into the field and collect their own aquarium fish. I had the chance in October of 2017 to do just that, and one of the fish that made it back home into my fishroom was the small cichlid, *Apistogramma rubrolineata*.

Apistogramma rubrolineata is relatively new to the hobby, only described in 2002 by Heine, Zarske, and Zapata. There are two known populations of the species, one in Bolivia and this one, from the Madre de Dios area of Peru. A fairly small *Apistogramma*, the males rarely reach three inches long and the females reach around two inches. The male is a light olive color with a dark zig-zag stripe following the lateral line and ending at the caudal peduncle in a dark spot. There are red stripes both above and below the lateral line, following the lines of scales. He has bright green markings on his face, sometimes continuing down his side and fading toward the tail. The rays of the dorsal, ventral and anal fins are also bright green, mixed with yellow on some individuals. Though not as brightly colored as some apistos, this is an attractive fish. The female is drab unless in spawning or brood-caring mode, at which time she adopts the standard bright yellow body with contrasting black markings, as most of the females of the genus show when in the same situation.

It was only our second day collecting in the Madre de Dios area of Peru when we entered the water of the *Alegria*, or "Happy Creek." The water was clear and soft: 17 ppm TDS, 6.5 pH, and 75° F, with a mixed mud and gravel bottom. The location we collected was slow flowing and shallow; most spots around two feet deep, a few holes were a foot deeper. There was very little vegetation in the creek, but plants from the forest hung into the water from both banks. Here we caught some tetras, two *Corydoras* species, and this *Apistogramma*. We saved about ten of these apistos,

making sure we had a mix of male and female.

For the rest of the week the fish were housed in the aquarium room at Go Wild Peru, the service that took us on the collecting trip. With many large tanks to house catches and a supply of soft warm water for changes, the fish were kept very healthy. Water changes were done nearly every day at a 30 to 50 percent rate. We were unable to take the fish with us when the trip was over, so it was a few weeks later that they were shipped. In that time the crew at GWP took good care of the fish, and there were very few losses.

Once the boxes arrived from Peru my fishroom was in chaos, but finally room was found for all the new fish. The new home for these *Apistogramma* was a 30-gallon cube style tank with soft, acidic water: pH 6, 60ppm TDS, and around 80°F for temperature. One large sponge filter was the only source of filtration and aeration, so there was little current in the aquarium. Some bog wood, a few java fern plants, and several clay pots broke up the line of sight, and the floor of the tank was covered with a thin layer of brown sand. The water change schedule was 30% each week with rain water, keeping the conditions soft and acidic.



Reprinted from *Tank Tales* – May, 2018 - Volume 47, Issue 5, The The Aquarium Club of Lancaster County.



The wild fish seemed at home from the start, and accepted most foods without a problem. They were fed twice daily: flake food in the mornings and either live or frozen food in the evening. The flake food alternated between four or five of the most popular brands and frozen food could be blood worms or chopped earthworms. Live foods were blackworms, white worms, daphnia, and black mosquito larvae.

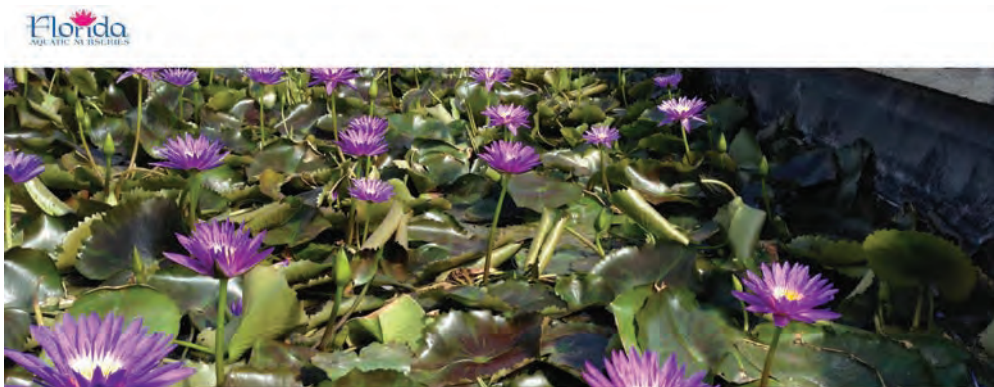
These fish aren't nearly as aggressive as some *Apistogramma* and there were very few altercations, and even those were minor, usually consisting of two males sparring and flaring fins. Sometimes the males could be seen chasing the females, but at that time the females were more interested in avoiding the males and finding food. It was only a few weeks after the fish arrived that I noticed the largest of the females at the opening of a clay pot, showing bright yellow color with jet black markings and acting quite ferocious. For the next few days she'd either be found just outside the pot or inside with her head protruding from the opening, not letting any other fish near the site.

One of the males, probably the father of the brood, could sometimes be seen a short distance away, patrolling the area, but he never came close to the nest. Finally, on the sixth day after I first notice the yellow female, she came out of the pot with a brood of about 40 tiny youngsters all around her. The young

fish were immediately able to take newly-hatched brine shrimp. They would consume them until there were none left and the young fishes' bellies were bloated and bright orange. The shrimp were their only food for the first few days, and then alternated with decapsulated brine shrimp eggs and Golden Pearls powdered food.

This diet, along with weekly water changes, provided the fish with all they needed to grow quickly; by week three they were three-eighths of an inch and by week six the largest of the brood were nearly three-quarters. Around this time the youngsters were already starting to spar and chase, acting much like the adults. The adult fish paid little attention to the juveniles once they stopped following the mother fish. All were kept in the breeding tank, with few problems other than squabbles over food.

In conclusion, this *Apistogramma*, though not as flashy as some others, is an attractive addition to a South American community tank or species tank. It's fairly easy to keep and breed, is undemanding of conditions, the young are hardy and grow quickly, and it doesn't present some of the aggression problems that so many cichlid species do.



The Rest Of The Story: The Dragon Murder Case Revisited

by JOSEPH FERDENZI

As devoted readers of *Modern Aquarium* may recall, in the February 1998 issue I wrote a short article about *The Dragon Murder Case*, a best-selling mystery novel by S.S. Van Dine. What is significant about that novel for aquarists is that it prominently features various elements involving the tropical fish hobby — the murder occurs on the estate of a Manhattan millionaire who is described as one of the world's leading amateur aquarists. An entire chapter is devoted to describing his immense fish room. The main character (sophisticated sleuth Philo Vance) reveals that he too is an amateur aquarist and proceeds to describe his own hobby achievements. Since writing that article I have stumbled across new information that has caused me to, let us say, revisit “the scene of the crime.”

In my first article about this mythical murder, I postulated that Van Dine must have been an actual hobbyist because the details about the aquarium hobby in his book were so accurate and because he had written an article about “green water” in the July 1934 issue of *The Aquarium* (the magazine published by the renowned William T. Innes). Well, the new information I discovered absolutely confirmed this theory, but simultaneously shocked me. The truth was even more incredible than I could have imagined. And part of the shock derived from the fact that this “new” information was not really new at all — it had always lurked in my library, but had simply been “lost” in my memory.

The rediscovery occurred on a recent day when I was preparing some notes about an old aquarium book that I was about to donate to a society event (November 1998). The book happened to be *Tropical Fishes And Home Aquaria*, by Alfred Morgan. This book was originally published in 1935, and was reprinted numerous times. Many years ago, I had acquired a copy of the first edition, and subsequently had acquired some copies of later editions. My original interest in the book had centered on the fact that Morgan had included, as an appendix, a list of the names and addresses of all the then known aquarium societies (which, as Morgan acknowledged, was reprinted from Innes's *The*

Aquarium magazine). Of primary interest was the fact that this list included our own Greater City Aquarium Society.

As I was perusing the book on this most recent occasion, my wife Anita happened to be looking over my shoulder. I was flipping through the pages, but only half paying attention to the text other than the title page and dates of publication, when Anita stopped me as the first page of the book's Foreword came into view, and rather innocently queried whether the author of the Foreword had the same name as the author of all those old mystery novels I had been reading as of late. Well, my eyes practically jumped out of their sockets. Sure enough, the printed page proclaimed the author of the Foreword as none other than S.S. Van Dine.

Why had I overlooked this when writing the first story about *The Dragon Murder Case*? I think that is easy to explain. You see, at the time I first read the Morgan book, I had no idea who S.S. Van Dine was. My 1935 edition has no dust jacket (which sometimes highly tout a Foreword written by someone famous), and the book itself contains no hint of Van Dine's celebrity. Having no clue that there was anything significant about the author of the Foreword, my memory bank relegated that fact to my mind's dust bin.

But now, having read many of Van Dine's Philo Vance novels, the Foreword of the Morgan book had taken on special meaning. First of all, its literary style is evocative of his novels. Secondly, it explicitly reveals that Van Dine was an avid hobbyist.

Indeed, the entire theme of the Foreword is that the tropical fish hobby is like a disease, and that he has caught it. But, Van Dine explains, he doesn't want to be “cured.” He goes on to list some of the fish he is keeping, using both common names and scientific ones (as he does in *The Dragon Murder Case*). He is obviously much enthralled by the hobby. The clearest manifestation of this passion is revealed when Van Dine tell us that he maintains sixty (60!) aquariums. My God, even by the standards of addicted hobbyists, that is a lot of fish water!

Reprinted from *Modern Aquarium* - May, 1999.

An excerpt from Tropical Fishes and Home Aquaria:

FOREWORD

BY S. S. VAN DINE

The breeding and raising of tropical fish is both a scientific pastime and a virulent disease. It is as fascinating as it is malignant. It is uplifting and edifying—and also bothersome and heart-breaking. But whatever the disadvantages may be, they are more than compensated for by the zealous ecstasy which simultaneously invades the aquarists bloodstream and inflames his hormones.

The disease of aquaritis is practically incurable, although there are records of occasional recovery where the disease was mild. In its usual malign form there is no hope for the patient. No antidote has yet been found. No cure has yet been discovered. And the curious and illuminating thing about this piscatorial malaise is that the victim does not desire surcease. He, and often she, wallows, as it were, in the symptoms, and even boasts of them proudly and lovingly, as one revels in and boasts of a painful and dangerous operation.

The as yet unisolated and mysterious germs of this ichthyological disease insinuated their way into my system years ago, and I joined that vast and ever increasing arm of ichthyophiles with hosannas in my heart and a wild fanatical look in my eye. I was badly stricken. Instead of a mere tank or two inhabited by the usual lowly Guppies, Swordtails, Platies, Scalares and Zebras, I had sixty tanks filled with the obscure aristocrats of Piscatoria—*Carnegiella strigata*, *Scatophagus argus* and *rubrifrons*, *Symphysodon discus*, *Barbus sumatranus*, *Pantodon buchholzi*, and various others whose classification had not even been determined by the professors.

The learned medicos, in solemn conclave, decided there was no hope for me. My condition was such that actual violence might set in at any moment. That I suffered I admit frankly. And I sought help from various sources. I knew I could never be completely cured, but I did crave assistance—something that would at least ameliorate the ravages of the malady that was undermining me. But it was nowhere to be found. I read all the books on the subject. I pored over thousands of pages for suggestions and advice that would help me meet the constantly recurring problems that arose during the early stages of the disease. And I knew that there were numberless other unhappy sufferers like myself who would welcome some such guidance and help. I, as well as all the others, had to struggle through without such help, testing, experimenting (and generally going wrong), getting discouraged, losing sleep, and wasting time and money.

Now comes a book which smooths the way for all those attacked by the insidious and tenacious germ of aquaritis—a book which will lessen the early pangs and pains of fish collecting, which gives excellent advice on the multiplicity of problems that beset the beginner in this fascinating hobby—a book which every one who owns aquaria should have and study. It is a much-needed work, for it has been done simply and well and, at the same time, thoroughly. It is not for those who have arrived at the tertiary stage of the disease (they need no such rudimentary help), but it will prove a boon to those newly infected, and will adequately point the way to the more difficult and complicated problems that arise in the advanced stages of tropical fish breeding and raising. If only such a book had been available when I was first smitten!

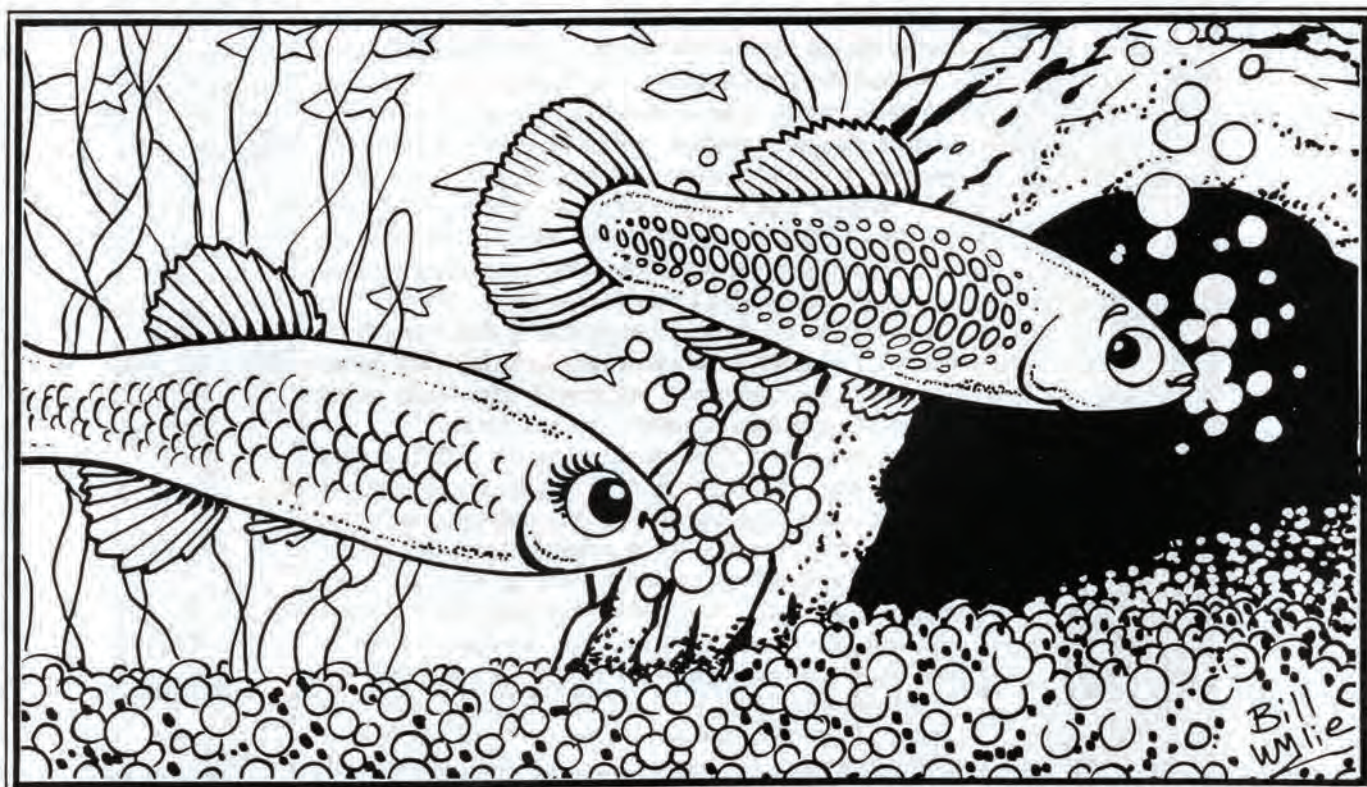
The book to which I refer in such enthusiastic terms is the one you now hold in your hands.

You will recall that this Foreword appeared in 1935. The Dragon Murder Case was first published in 1933. The proximity of these dates leads one to believe that the Dragon novel was most certainly influenced by Van Dine's love of the hobby — so much so that he had to build a murder story around it. This Foreword sheds a great deal of light as to the inspiration for the novel. In fact, the mysterious murders in the novel all occur in a large, naturally-formed swimming pool (a pond, if you will) — witnesses see the victims enter the pool, and when they don't emerge, a search of the pool turns up their bodies, but no murderer is ever seen entering or leaving the pool. For those of you who are mystery novel fans, you will recognize this as essentially a variation of the traditional "locked room" mystery — a dead body is found in a room that, at the time of the murder, witnesses swear no one could have entered or left without being seen (as in, for example, Van Dine's earlier The "Canary" Murder Case). The variation on this theme in The Dragon Murder Case is decidedly aquatic — a "locked" pool — very likely inspired by the aquarium "disease" then infecting the author.

Two curiosities remain unresolved by my research. How did it come to pass that Van Dine wrote this Foreword for the Morgan book? After all, 1935 was a banner year in the history of aquarium publishing. For example, that was the year in which Innes published his first edition of Exotic Aquarium Fishes, destined to become the most famous book in the history of the American hobby. Was Morgan simply the first to ask Van Dine on the strength of his having read The Dragon Murder Case and realizing that Van Dine was familiar with the hobby? Unfortunately, the answer is probably to be found in the prosaic happenstance that both the Morgan book and the Van Dine books were published by Charles Scribner's Sons. The second curiosity is that, while the Morgan book's Foreword uses the pen name Van Dine, its Table of Contents lists not a "Foreword," but a "Preface" authored by Willard Huntington Wright, which was Van Dine's real name! Was this just a proofreading goof? Or, was it an intentional "tease" designed to see if the astute reader would "put two and two together" and solve the mystery of Van Dine's "secret identity"?



THE AMUSING AQUARIUM



Madagascar fish come-on line: "Dr Loiselle says we're on the endangered species list. So I feel it's our duty to come to this nesting site and . . ."

Mysteries of the Deep

A Review

by Dan Radebaugh

Over the past few years I have reviewed several TV series in which Jeremy Wade, a now well-known scientist and angler, has explored the habitats and behaviors of various aquatic and marine creatures. The former star and narrator of **River Monsters**, **Mighty Rivers**, and **Dark Waters** is now hosting a new series on the Science Channel (a part of the Discovery network) entitled **Mysteries of the Deep**. There are a total of ten titles in this series, of which I watched three of four of them this afternoon and evening (July 16).

What to me was immediately striking about this new series (besides the absence of fish) is Mr. Wade's role. Rather than hacking his way through swamps, rivers and all manner of other habitats hunting down mysterious monsters of possibly dangerous repute, Mr. Wade is in this series the narrator, supplying the gravitas to mold the stories together into a somewhat unified whole. I must say that he does so quite handily!

Bear in mind that (at least to my way of thinking) the Science Channel is intended for 'mainstream' audiences, so there's a certain level of hyperbole that starts to wear me down a bit after a while. For instance I wasn't quite prepared for the segment on UFOs, though in truth there has been a lot of weird stuff in the news lately, such as the Navy deciding to let its

Episode 1

Jeremy Wade explores an incredible underwater discovery in the Arctic. Could it reveal what really happened to the ill-fated Franklin expedition?

Episode 2

Mummy On The Ghost Ship

When a mummy is discovered on an abandoned boat, investigators struggle to explain where it came from; Jeremy Wade reveals what happened.

Episode 3

Curse Of The Kraken

Jeremy Wade reveals the new deep-sea discoveries that might prove the existence of the infamous giant squid. Is this underwater monster the legendary kraken?

Episode 4

The Bermuda Triangle Conspiracy

Jeremy Wade investigates if one of the Bermuda Triangle's most infamous disappearances was part of a conspiracy by a secret agent at war with the U.S.



pilots actually report 'impossible' UFO sightings, a couple of which I've looked at and have had to say, "Hmmmm!" So perhaps my skeptical complaint is out of order.

Below and on the following page are the episodes of this current series.

Episode 5

Jeremy Wade explores the sinking of the mighty S.S. Fitzgerald. Can new discoveries finally tell us what led to one of the biggest catastrophes on the Great Lakes?

Episode 6

Jeremy Wade explores an incredible underwater discovery in the Arctic. Could it reveal what really happened to the ill-fated Franklin expedition?

Episode 7

Jeremy Wade explores how fresh insights into ancient boat building techniques shed new light on the truth behind the biblical story of Noah's Flood.

Episode 8

Jeremy Wade explores a new theory that could explain what happens in the world's most infamous stretch of water. Is this enduring mystery about to be solved?

Episode 9

Nazi Toxic Hell Sub

Jeremy explores a perfectly preserved 140-year-old wreck at the bottom of the Great Lakes. And what's the dark secret buried inside a Nazi submarine?

Episode 10

Jeremy explores the loss of a NASA space capsule deep in the Atlantic. And what is the underwater secret behind ship disappearances in the Devil's Sea?

Mysteries of the Deep is produced for Discovery Channel by Icon Films. For Icon Films, executive producers are Stephen McQuillan and Nicholas White. Neil Laird executive produces on behalf of the network.



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GCAS Happenings

September

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No meeting or bowl show in August

OFFICIAL 2020 BOWL SHOW TOTALS:

HARRY FAUSTMANN	5	WILLIAM AMELY	1	JOHN BUZZETTI	3
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Meeting times and locations of many of the aquarium societies in the Metropolitan New York City area. COVID-19 could cause cancellations! Check before you go!



GREATER CITY AQUARIUM SOCIETY

Next Meeting: TBA

Speaker:

Event:

Meets: The first Wednesday of each month

(except January & February) at 7:30pm:

Queens Botanical Garden

43-50 Main Street - Flushing, NY

Contact: Horst Gerber (718) 885-3071

Email: pilotcove43@gmail.com

Website: <http://www.greatercity.net>

BIG APPLE GUPPY CLUB

Meets: Last Tuesday each month (except Jan, Feb, July, and August) at 7:30-10:00pm.

Alley Pond Environmental Ctr.: 228-06 Northern Blvd.

Contact: Donald Curtin (718) 631-0538

BROOKLYN AQUARIUM SOCIETY



Next Meeting: September 11, 2020

Speaker: Harry Faustmann

Topic: Live Food

Meets: 2nd Friday of the month (except July and August) at 7:30pm:

NY Aquarium - Education Hall, Brooklyn, NY

Call: BAS Events Hotline: (718) 837-4455

Website: <http://www.brooklyn-aquarium-society.org>

LONG ISLAND AQUARIUM SOCIETY



Next Meeting: September, 2020

Speaker: TBA

Topic: TBA

Meets: 3rd Friday of each month (except July and August) at 8:00 PM.

LIAS Meetings are held at SUNY Stony Brook's Maritime Science area. Room 120 in

Endeavor Hall on the State University at Stony Brook

Campus, Stony Brook, NY 11790

Email: president@liasonline.org

Website: <http://liasonline.org/>

EAST COAST GUPPY ASSOCIATION



Meets: 2nd Tuesday of each month at 8:00 pm at Alley Pond Environmental Ctr.: 228-06 Northern Blvd.

Contact: Gene Baudier (631) 345-6399

NASSAU COUNTY AQUARIUM SOCIETY



Next Meeting: TBA

Event: TBA

Topic: TBA

Meets: 2nd Tuesday of the month (except July and August) at 7:30 PM. Molloy College, at 1000

Hempstead Avenue, Rockville Centre, NY, in the Hagan Center for Nursing building, in the lower level, classroom #H006. See website for directions.

Contact: Harry W. Faustmann, (516) 804-4752.

Website: <http://www.ncasweb.org>

NORTH JERSEY AQUARIUM SOCIETY



Next Meeting: TBA

Speaker: TBA

Topic: TBA

Meets: 12:30 PM - 3rd Saturday of the month, Clark Public Library in Union County, just off the Parkway at exit 135

Contact: NJAS Hotline at (732) 332-1392

Email: tcoletti@obius.nj.com

Website: <http://www.njas.net/>

NORWALK AQUARIUM SOCIETY



Next Meeting: August 20, 2019

Speaker: TBA

Topic: TBA

Meets: 8:00 P.M. - 3rd Thursday of each month except for July & December at:

Earthplace - the Nature Discovery Center - Westport, CT

Contact: Sal Silvestri

Call our toll free number (866) 219-4NAS

Email: salsilv44@yahoo.com

Website: <http://norwalkas.org/>

Ultra-black Fish Matters

A series by "The Undergravel Reporter"

In spite of popular demand to the contrary, this humor and information column continues. As usual, it does NOT necessarily represent the opinions of the Editor, or of the Greater City Aquarium Society.

Smithsonian Magazine recently reported on a study published in the journal **Current Biology** documenting what has been termed "ultra-blackness" in 16 species of deep-sea fish.

"Ultra-black" is defined as reflecting less than 0.5 percent of incoming light. (By comparison, black paper actually reflects about 10 percent of incoming light, so it's about 20 times lighter than ultra-black.)

Fish have essentially three options to survive in the deep-sea where there are few places to hide: be big, be fast, or be invisible. Being big and fast takes a lot of energy, which requires a lot of food. Being invisible, on the other hand, may be a better strategy for escaping predators and moving through the water undetected by prey. This study points to an evolutionary tactic that gives some fishes an "invisibility cloak."

This ultra-black skin color could provide insight into developing new synthetic camouflage materials, as well as have implications for the understanding and treatment of skin cancers.



Reference:

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/Elusive-Ultra-black-Fishes-Are-Cloaked-to-Survive-the-Deep-Ocean-180975367/>



Fin Fun



The Aquatic Gardener

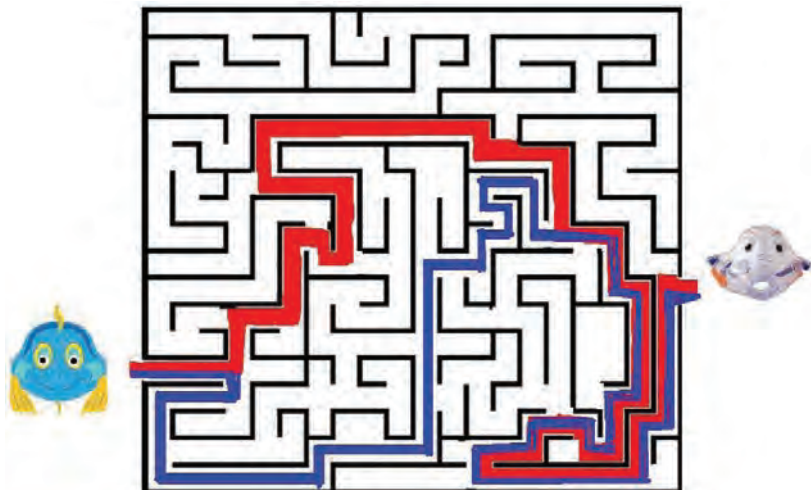
Can you find all of the words in the right column below, all of which are either names or parts of names (scientific and common) for some common aquarium plants?

S	A	E	Y	F	V	C	R	J	P	C	Y	G	C	A	M	T	U
M	W	P	C	H	Z	A	O	O	R	C	M	C	R	N	V	R	G
I	A	O	O	H	O	N	L	F	T	R	X	B	Y	U	I	J	L
C	N	F	R	N	I	R	A	L	F	A	W	S	P	B	S	A	U
R	A	G	B	D	O	N	N	J	I	E	L	P	T	I	A	V	D
O	C	S	A	N	P	G	O	W	A	S	E	A	O	A	L	A	W
S	H	S	R	X	T	L	E	D	O	S	N	F	C	S	V	F	I
O	A	U	T	P	U	Z	A	T	O	R	P	E	O	C	I	E	G
R	R	W	E	T	C	D	O	N	O	R	T	S	R	L	N	R	I
U	I	M	R	I	J	G	H	Q	T	N	U	R	Y	I	I	N	A
M	S	N	I	D	U	C	K	W	E	E	D	S	N	X	A	A	J
S	A	G	I	T	T	A	R	I	A	G	D	Z	E	V	V	J	B

ANACHARIS
ANUBIAS
APONOGETON
BARTERI
COFFEEFOLIA
CRYPTOCORYNE
DUCKWEED
ECHINODORUS
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Solution to our last puzzle: Who is That Masked Fish?

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- Comparing Trickle Towers with Bakki Showers by Syd Mitchell
- Mycobacteriosis (one of the few diseases that can be transmitted by Koi to humans) by Diana Walstad
- The Science behind using Clay in Ponds by Syd Mitchell
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