FinTAStic

The Official Publication of the Angelfish Society

Issue #21 August 2008

IN THIS ISSUE:

Interview with Steve Rybicki of Angels Plus
Photo Contest Winner Mario Toromanovic
Newbie Corner
August Heat and more!

FinTAStic

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Photographs: Please do not send in physical media such as photographic prints or slides. All photographs should be submitted as digital media files. RAW files directly from your from digital cameras are preferable. The preferred formats are High quality .JPG, TIFF, PNG or GIF files. Please do not edit the files in any way, and do not resize them.

Computer Graphics files: All images submitted for publication must be at high resolution. As with photos, please submit any work as JPG, TIFF, PNG or GIF files.

Art works: If you are submitting pieces of 2D artwork, sketches, paintings etc. please scan the artworks at high resolution. Minimum 600DPI, 1200 DPI is preferable.

The Angelfish Society is a not-for-profit corporation. dedicated to the enhancement of the Angelfish through high quality breeding programs using standards established by the society.

We are a collection of Angelfish enthusiasts, hobbyists and breeders who are interested in the advancement of our hobby, through improvements in the quality of the fish we keep and breed, by employing the standards which this society will develop.

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THIS ISSUE'S COVER

This issues cover features a stunning Koi Angelfish bred by our own Mario Toromanovic, and was the winner of the August TAS Photo contest.

The Angelfish Society Website:

http://www.theangelfishsociety.org

From the Editor.....

Steve Rogers

August 2008

Greetings fellow Angelfish fanatics,

welcome to the all new FinTASic newsletter!

I'd like to start by thanking all the really great and enthusiastic people who put in the time and effort to help get this relaunch organized and put together in the short amount of time that we had to accomplish the task at hand. It was a lot of fun and I'm looking forward to a long association with them.

When I became editor, I pondered what my first editorial would be. Then I realized that none of you really know who I am, I thought I'd share some of my background with you.

Aquariums have been a hobby of mine for many years. At age 13 I got my first aquarium, a 10 gallon aquarium kit complete with a box filter, metal frame, metal top and a slate bottom.

My mom took e to the local fish store, and I selected a small collection of Green Swordtails, 2 males, and 4 females. There was no planning involved in the selection or anything, I had no designs to create a breeding colony of the most common of swordtail varieties, it was just fate I guess.

In a very short time, I found myself in the possession of a second 10 gallon aquarium kit by necessity. As the growing population of swordtails grew, the need to find new homes for them became greater, and placing a free ad in the local weekly publication looked like a good idea. In retrospect, I am sure this was my parents darkest hour!

One person who called regarding my ad brought a copy of the local fish club newsletter with her to give me. I was thrilled to see that there were people who all liked fish that got together, and my next step was going to one of their meetings.

As it happened, a number of club officers were listed with addresses and phone numbers in the newsletter, and much to my good fortune, the club president lived very near me, so I called him and asked if I could ride along with him to the next meeting.

For a 13 year old this was an incredible experience. I was overwhelmed by the scope of things. They had a “bowl show” every month, where prizes were awarded for some small fish you brought in to be judged. And talk of fish was everywhere, all kinds of things I had never heard of.

Then I noticed one person, you all know one like him, he's the guy everyone seems to gravitate to, and listen to what he has to say. The local expert, the guru, whatever you want to call him, he's the guy with the natural talent. His name was Jerry Asper.

Eager to learn, I listened too. I was even invited to come over and see his fish room. My very accommodating mother drove me over, and tolerated sitting and waiting for me as I marveled at an incredible collection of things I had never heard of, African Cichlids, Angelfish, Discus..... I was amazed beyond belief.

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I guess I owe Jerry a lot, his fish room got me hooked for life! Jerry was a long time member of the ACA, and while he had a lot of fish, his real specialty was the dozens of pairs of Angelfish breeders he kept and raised.

Over the next couple of years I earned lots of free fish by going over to Jerry's on the weekends and helping him clean tanks, do water changes feed fish, we all know the routine.

One weekend as I was helping clean tanks, Jerry tells me that he needs more space, and pointing to a tank, he asks me if I would bag all the fish in the tank, and then informs me that I can take them home with me.

The tank was absolutely packed with beautiful dark marbled Angelfish fry, about the size of a thumbnail. This batch of a hundred plus angels were my first, but far from my last angelfish, and they rapidly became my favorites.

Over the next couple of years I would add many more varieties of Angels, and my interest in fish would eventually spill over into Discus, and a pretty varied variety of African and South American Cichlids.

This would also mean that I ended up buying more and more tanks as my hobby took on a life of it's own. When I was old enough to get a job, it seemed almost all of my money went into buying something I "had" to have, be it a new aquarium, latest issues fo TFH, or the catfish I couldn't do without.

Through it all, my mom was pretty tolerant. there were more than a few times where she helped me pay for something I wanted, and she didn't complain about it.

She didn't even complain when I had basically taken over the basement because I needed more space.

I had many tanks that were cobbled to gether creations, like the steel liners once used as the insides of refrigerators before plastic became common in appliances.

I even had one of those sheet metal swimming pools with the mylar liners and a pond pump running in it.

Sometimes I think my parents heaved a big sigh of relief when I graduated high school and moved out on my own!

By the time I joined the Air Force and left home, I had several hundreds of fish, mostly angels, and many more aquariums than I had every imagined possible.

More than 20 years have passed since then, and I'm still as enthusiastic about fish as I was when I was a kid.

I have a family now, four very enthusiastic and intelligent boys, all interested in some of the same thigs I was when I was a kid and I get to relive all the fun and excitement of new fish through them.

We enjoy a very diverse range of fish and odd pets including many types of snakes and reptiles, none of which my wife really likes, but she is amazingly understanding of the asylum she has found herself in!

It's funny that for me, it all started with just a newsletter.....

Steve Rogers
Editor, FinTAStic.

Letter from the President.....

Lori Carr

August 2008

Hello Fellow Members!! I would like to welcome all of our newest members to TAS. It's great to have you here! The summer months tend to be busy. It's a time when we get caught up with all of our outdoor projects, and also a time when we are out enjoying the summer weather and the great out doors. It's easy to overlook the monthly TAS meetings. Still we welcome all of you to come to the meetings. Summer allows us to offer some really great door prizes. Live angelfish!! Several of us are donating beautiful baby angelfish for door prizes. Keep that in mind and come drop in for a meeting. Who knows - maybe you will be the next lucky winner!!!!

A special "thank you" to Doug Hundley for donating juvenile koi angelfish for our May meeting, and to Nancy Martens for donating pre-dime size turquoise, smokey turquoise, smokey blushing and double dark black blushing angelfish for our June meeting!

We are always in need of articles for the FinTastic newsletter, so if you have anything angelfish related you wish to share please send it to the newsletter committee.

TAS Welcomes our Newest members Feb. 1, 2008 - Aug 14, 2008

Tracey Bartone
Angela Browm
Joshua Brown
Margo Cardona
Matt Concannon
Paul Cromwell
James Durivou
Kathi Fluck
Jim Geyerman
Tabitha Holz
Jim Hughes
Selena Jackson
Michael Keding
Volodymyr Khoma
Jason Knoles
Dave Kohler
Vladimir Kozhuharov
Tasha LaBelle
Joe Mason
Jay McClellan
Michael Miller
Frank Morgan
Chris Morrison
Beverly Newcomer
Scott Oestreich
Felix Potvin
Steve Rogers
John Shafer
Rhonda Smith
Jessica Spiegel
Luis Tamarelle
John Wilde
Danny Williams
Frank Bayne
William Beck
Jeff Bolback
John Burns
William Carico
Andrea Devlin
Nick Feydo
Tracey Hall
Christine Hopkins
James McKeever
Daragh Owens
Nikolay Tkachenk
Clifford Walker
Ray Wetzel

Mario Toromanovic Photo Contest Winner

Interview by Tamar Stephens August 2008

Mario Toromanovic won the May 2008 photo contest by a landslide with his young brilliantly-orange koi angelfish. For the past decade, angelfish breeders have been striving to raise koi angelfish with ever increasing amounts of orange.

What is a koi angelfish? Another name is gold marble blusher. A koi angelfish has one of two genotypes: Gm/Gm – S/S or Gm/g – S/S. This means that it is either homozygous for the gold marble allele, or it has one gold marble allele paired with one gold allele. In addition, it is homozygous for the stripeless trait. When the stripeless allele is present in double dose, the operculi (gill plates) are unpigmented. The gills, with freshly oxygenated blood, show a bright pink color through the translucent operculi, giving the blushing appearance.

I knew that other members of TAS would be eager to hear how Mario was able to raise such a striking fish, and he generously shared his experiences with me. As you will see, koi angelfish are not his only interest!

Tamar: Your orange koi is an absolute beauty! How long have you been keeping and raising angelfish?

Mario: I've been keeping fish since I was a little kid. My dad and I made my first fish tank from glass that he cut himself. We put it together with silicone. It leaked a lot, but it held enough water for few black mollies for a long time! I started keeping and breeding angels about 15 years ago.

Mario's exquisite Koi Angelfish. This photo won first place in The Angelfish Society May 2008 photo contest

Tamar: How did you get started with keeping and raising angelfish?

Mario: My first angels were few gold babies from a local fish store that was going out of business. I got them for 50% off. Sure enough, a few months later they spawned on one of the filter tubes.

"My first angels were few gold babies from a local fish store that was going out of business"

From that point on I was "hooked"! It was hard in the beginning, because I was living in apartments, but once we moved into our house I "occupied" our laundry room in the basement and started some serious angelfish breeding.

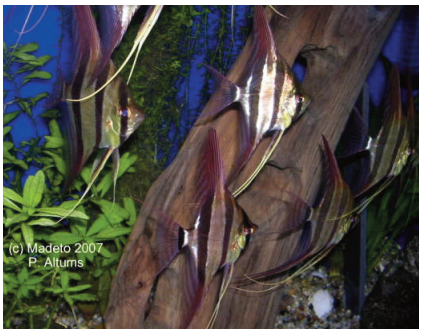
continued next page

Tamar: How many aquariums with angelfish do you have?

Mario: In my laundry/fish room, I have around 30 tanks. I have my 150 and 55 gallon show tanks in the living room and bedrooms. My fish room tanks range from 5 to 40 gallons. About 90 percent are angelfish. I have some Apistos. Most tanks have some kind of Plecostomus, mostly bristle nose, with a few larger ones.

Tamar: Is the Koi your favorite variety of angelfish? Do you raise other varieties, and do you have any other favorites?

Mario: In last 15 years I've successfully bred lots of angelfish types. I will have to say that my favorite variety is one that I still haven't successfully bred: P. Altum. I have a breeding group of Altums in my 150 gal show tank (see photo) that I purchased on Aquabid four years ago at quarter size. A few times they came so close to spawning, with breeding tubes out, cleaning a leaf - but they've never laid any eggs. That is my number one goal for now – to spawn Altums!



Mario's 150 gallon show tank with Pterophyllum "Altum" angelfish.

My other favorite varieties and the ones that I'm currently keeping and breeding are ones with recessive genes: half-blacks, albinos, pearlscale, platinums and of course Koi. With Koi I'm just trying to see if I can get them to express red over close to 100 percent of the body, including all fins, and I'm breeding to try to remove black patches from bodies. My other projects at this time are crossing half-blacks with albinos, then crossing them back to see what will I get. I'm also working on half-black blushing veil tails. I have some, in limited quantities. (see picture)

Tamar: What advice would you give to others who aspire to raise koi angelfish with this much orange?

A juvenile half-black blushing veil tail bred and raised by Mario

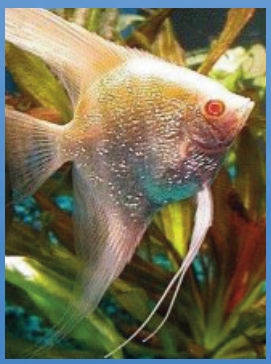
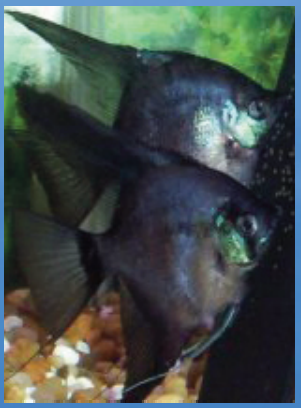
Mario: Everybody can answer this question - good genes, quality food and lots of water changes. Also lighting is very important with Koi.

Genes - I have my own line that I developed with a single koi angelfish from local fish store almost ten years ago. Back then it was the most beautiful koi I had ever seen. That fish, a male, was grandfather of all my Koi. During the years I've cross-bred with other Koi that I got in trade with people from a local fish club, and from some friends and family members.

Food - Koi get their red and orange colors from food. Many people claim that they don't feed color enhancing foods, but I doubt that. Since I work days, and this is only my hobby, I feed all my fish twice a day. Mornings I feed them brine shrimp flake food and nights I feed frozen or live brine shrimp and blood worms. I love feeding live foods when I can, but they are not always available and can be quite pricey.

Water Changes - Most of my tanks are connected to a central water change system, so I change 25 – 30 percent of the water in my tanks every one to two days.

Lighting - I use compact fluorescent lights to get good color development. I found this out by accident. A few years ago I had some 10 gallon tanks next to each other, most with fluorescent light hoods on top. One tank had regular light sockets with the elongated incandescent aquarium bulbs. When they burned out I replaced them with compact fluorescent bulbs. When I separated some of the small Koi from that tank, I noticed that their color was much more intense than others from the same spawn in other tanks. They were all the same size, and were fed the same foods. I noticed that the lighting is only important for small Koi, while they are developing. The only drawback is that there is a lot more algae in these tanks, but that is corrected with lots of water changes.

Welcome to the TAS Forum!

"I want to thank you for all the help, I'm not sure I could have managed without all the advice I have received from this forum." - Micki

"The massive amount of knowledge I learned from this was worth every second I spent there" - Steve

To see what people are talking about,
visit the TAS forums at:
www.theangelfishsociety.org

Steve Rybicki owner Angel's Plus

Interview by Sarah Smith August 2008

Sarah: The obvious...how long have you been keeping angels?

Steve: I got my first angelfish around 1965, and have had them on a near continuous basis since then. My first breeding pair that produced spawns for me was a pair of wild-type silvers in 1968. I had many pairs over the next 14 years, but never more than 3 or 4 at a time. I built my first hatchery in 1982 which is when I started keeping very large numbers.

Sarah: What got you into the keeping angelfish hobby?

Steve: Like most people keeping tropical fish, I got angelfish because I couldn't resist. They are arguably the most attractive/interesting of tropical fish. What kept me drawn to them, was the ease at which one could manipulate their appearance and to create new varieties.

Sarah: What other fish (if any) do you keep?

Steve: I've had show strains of guppies for decades. I have also kept and bred discus for many years.

I currently have some ponds with some high quality Japanese lines of Koi (carp) I hope to start breeding. In the past, I've bred goldfish and bettas in large numbers. As one can see, the common theme is ornamental and pliable in appearance.

Sarah: How many tanks/gallons do you currently keep?

Steve: I have so many I've never counted them all. It's in the hundreds of tanks.

Sarah: What's one thing that you'd tell a new angelfish keeper that you wish someone had told you?

Steve: That's a difficult one to answer. No one ever told me anything and I sometimes think that is why I'm successful. So much misinformation is going around, that I believe most are hurt, not helped by much of it. I had to figure out things for myself and I found that I progressed to a very high level because I didn't rely on information that is often wrong. I experimented and carefully observed results to figure out the best way to do things. Today, people rely far too much on others to help them and never consider the possibility that it's not the best way.

Constant research and experimentation is the most important thing in my opinion, but no one had to tell me this. I did it out of necessity.

Sarah: How did you go from marine biology to making a living raising angelfish?

Steve: My original major was wildlife biology, not marine biology.

When I found out how difficult it was to get a job as a wildlife biologist, I switched majors. Once out of school, I got a job that I wasn't thrilled with. I constantly thought about fish and how people would want what I had if they could only see them. I sold thousands of angelfish to local shops, but not enough to consider living off the profits. My fish room grew larger and larger, I bought food in bulk and started selling it to the local aquarium society.

A gorgeous Albino Angel from Angels Plus

On a whim, I put an ad in an aquarium magazine and it was shortly after when I realized that I could do this for a living. It was a big jump, but I quit my job and dove head first into raising angelfish for a living. The hours were unreal, and I often thought "why am I doing this". I would never recommend it to anyone who isn't willing to work 2 to 3 times the amount of a normal job, and to do it without benefits or vacations. No weekends off and no holidays. However, in the long run, I am happy to be working in my own business.

Sarah: How and why you were a part of founding TAS?

Steve: There was a period of time that angelfish sellers were much like discus breeders. People changed the names more often than they changed their underwear. It was marketing designed to deceive the buyer.

If the buyer never heard of it, they'd buy it. I had been fed up with this for many years.

On the old angelfish forum, there was a group of us discussing this and I agreed to organize a club that would recruit members who agreed to follow naming standards. TAS was born and has evolved from this.

Sarah: What does it take to maintain high quality lines of angelfish?

Steve: I've mentioned this to many people over the years. The answer is simple - experimentation and observation. I know it's not the nice formula that everyone wants, but it's really the only way I know.

You experiment with different husbandry techniques and very carefully observe the results and adjust accordingly. This way you can rather

quickly learn the ideal way to raise beautiful angelfish in your water conditions. It's work, which is not what most want more of. You have to be organized and have the ability to think out a problem. However, it works if you stick to it.

By Sarah Smith

Newbie Corner.....

by Kathi Fluck August 2008

Welcome to Newbies' Corner.

It's a section in the newsletter where we'll try to share tips and techniques that have worked for other angelfish enthusiasts in order to help the ones who are new to the hobby. We should always learn from our successes and our mistakes, and that's the idea behind this feature of the newsletter.

To those who have been keeping angelfish for years and years, most of this stuff will be "old hat" for you, however; there may be a few things you could pick up, too. Anyway, everybody remembers when we first started this hobby and learned some lessons the hard way. Hopefully you'll discover some things here that will help you.
--Kathi

Angelfish and Heat

We all know that angelfish are found in South America, where the water is constantly warm. But what exactly is the perfect temperature for angelfish in a tank? Answers vary from one person to the next; some keep their water at 78 F; some at 84 F degrees; and others at temperatures in between. Which one is right? That's your decision.

For the most people, the temperature range of choice is 80-82 F, although a great many go with 82-84 F.

It's important to keep in mind that cold temperatures can weaken a fish's immune system. Various factors can stress a fish: poor water conditions, crowding, bullying or nutritional deficiency. If the water temperature is too low, it may become sick and unable to fight bacteria commonly found in the water. In some cases, the end result is fish death. Warmer water keeps the fish's immune system working at it's optimum, thus enabling it to fight off other factors that could cause sickness. It stimulates metabolic activity of fish. They eat more and grow faster and that means greater waste production. It should be noted that high water temperatures can deplete the water of oxygen, so additional aeration is necessary.

Whether you choose to keep your tank cooler or warmer, the temperature should be constant because fish are sensitive to temperature changes. That's why a good heater is important. A faulty heater that varies the temperature from day to day could be a disaster in the making. Should the heater malfunction and raise the temperature without your noticing, you could fry your fish. Likewise, finding a tank full of cold water could also result in their demise. To avoid either situation, it is important to always monitor your water temperature whenever you are around your fish. A simple scan of your tanks for the temperature takes seconds, but those few seconds are nonetheless important for your fishes' health.

continued

newbie corner continued:

Always have a back up heater. Heaters never break down at a convenient time, so it's well worth the $20 or so to keep one ready to switch out in case of failure. There are many brands of heaters available, and most are pretty comparable. Most are totally submersible and shut off automatically when taken out of water; however, some do not. (Read the packaging when you purchase your heater so you know if it doesn't shut off.) Some are made of heavy-duty shock-resistant glass. In spite of being shock-resistant, exercise care when moving it; an unnoticed cracked heater can lead to a deadly outcome. Some heaters are made of reinforced plastic or titanium, and these can take more abuse; but some of these do not have indicator lights, so it is not as obvious if it is not plugged in or if it isn't working. (This is where the habit of checking the temperatures on your tanks comes in handy).

Consider plugging your heater into a separate power strip from your filter. When feeding fish or cleaning a tank, the filter is usually shut off. If your heater is plugged into the same power strip as the filter, the tank temp could drop significantly, depending upon the length of time you leave your filter off.

If you're cleaning a tank and taking the water level below the heater, you should unplug the heater. But it can be so easy to forget to plug it back in when the cleaning is done, so it isn't a bad idea to put the heater on the bottom of the tank, leave the heater plugged in, and make sure the water level doesn't drop below the heater.

Heat is essential in your angelfish tank, and it is in your fish's best interest to make sure it is a constant presence under the right conditions. Happy fishing!

Note: If you have any suggestions, questions or problems that you'd like to see addressed in future newsletters, please don't hesitate to contact me at

kathif@geeo.net

FinTAStic needs you!

Do you have an interesting story to tell ?

Would you like to be part of a creative team ?

FinTAStic is looking for authors, artists and people with general knowledge to be a part of our team.

Getting a Chance to Judge.....

by Isaiah Jenkins August 2008

I recently started showing my fish at fish conventions. After placing second in my first show, the NJAS (North Jersey Aquarium Society), my fish had a couple months of rest. Shortly after that, I found out about another show that would be only about 25 miles away. I would also be able to go the auction this time.

I chose which fish I would show about a month before the event and began to condition them. "How Do Like Me Now," the panda koi who took second at the NJAS show, was in a divided thirty gallon tank with more than a third to himself for a month before the show. Water changes where done at least twice a week to keep his fins in top condition. I fed him small amounts about five times a day.

This show was so close to home that I decided to set up the night before so my tanks could adjust to the room temperature before I added the fish. I brought my goldfish that I was showing Friday night, but didn't want to bring my tropicals until the next morning. I met some of the members of the fish club and we discussed some of the fish that were already there. Then came a real surprise: I was asked to help judge the next day. I was very excited!

I didn't get much sleep the night before the show. The next morning, I got up at 4 a.m.and made myself a cup of tea. I proceeded to have some fun, picking out pea size koi from one of my grow out tanks to sell at the auction.

I then packed up my other auction fish, a proven koi pair and an unknown type of cichlid, and was off.

The temperature outside was about 18 degrees Celsius, so it was not going to be easy getting the fish there alive. (I took two of the top fish in my breeding program, so I was a little nervous.)

I transported my fish in five gallon buckets so their fins would not be damaged. The car was warmed up before we brought the fish out and I wrapped them up in blankets to retain as much heat as possible. I was so worried about my angelfish I forgot to bring one of my other entries.

My show angelfish were all Koi's: one was a panda koi (How Do You Like Me Now), a calico (Aragon) and a 90% orange (In Love with a Koi). I set up my ten gallon tanks with air stones and brought my own water. There was one other angelfish in the class, a fairly solid Gold Marble of good size.

This show had about 60 entries, including about 6 just beautiful goldfish.

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a chance to judge continued

I felt really honored by being asked to help judge, and I was very glad I had kept over 100 species of fish so I had a fairly good general knowledge of how a lot of different types of fish will look.

My assignment was to judge the guppy and the livebearer classes. I did this by looking for flaws and comparing the flaws from one fish against the flaws of another fish. You can eliminate a lot of fish fairly quickly by doing this.

Things judges look for are tears in fins, fins that have healed, missing scales and paired fins not being evenly matched. A fish just sitting on the bottom of the tank is not going to be ranked as highly as a very similar fish or even a lesser fish that is swimming around the tank with its fins well spread. The two biggest factors I would have to say are size and how the fish holds itself in a show tank.

I was the least experienced of the three judges and have to say that there were very few, if any, “prefect” fish in the classes I judged. I saw really only one fish I totally loved: a green lyretail sailfin molly. While I was judging the two classes, the auction started. I had looked over the auction fish earlier and given my dad a list of fish I was interested in along with the amounts I wanted to bid. When I was finished judging, I found my dad. He had gotten the two bags of fish that I wanted and yes, one I didn’t want. (Oh well.)

Because this was my first auction, I was on the lookout for any deals. I bought about 30 fish including koi swordtails, bristlenose plecos, guppies, discus, kribs and black angels. It was a lot of fun.

After the auction I was invited to view a couple of fish rooms before it was time to pack up. The first fish room I went to was done by of one of the judges. He had bred all sorts of livebearers including a critically endangered one.

There were about 67 tanks with plants growing all over the place. It was really neat to see all the different types of livebearers! He even gave me 4 wild swordtails!

I then went to a smaller fish room—with about 12 tanks--of various fish. There was a native tank with wild caught Texas cichlids, longears and green sailfin mollies, And African yellow labids, frontosas, demasonis and pseudotropheus acei. I didn’t take any pictures at this fish room, but I probably should have.

I returned to where my fish tanks were and began to get my fish ready for the ride home. Because this show was held in the children’s department of a library, kids had been viewing the fish all day and even got to pick best of show and reserve of show.

Hopefully it will inspire the kids to get into this wonderful hobby.

All in all, I had a great time. Oh, and best of all, my calico koi placed first, my panda koi placed second, and the gold marble placed third. I can’t wait for the next show!

TAS Photo Contest News

by Kathi Fluck August 2008

Due to computer crashes, work issues and events beyond human control, there have been some changes in the Photo Contest Committee. Hi, my name is Kathi Fluck, and I am the new chairperson of this committee.

Bob Barone and Sarah Smith are my fellow committee members. During the transition of committee members, there were delays in notifying winners and posting photos. We apologize for the delays and won't let it happen again.

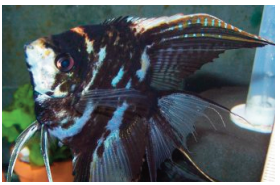
The March Photo Contest featured Silvers....

The March photo contest featured silvers. Congratulations to March winners: 1st place-Chance Maguire, 2nd place-tie between Matt Concannon and Charles Hawks, 3rd place-Matt Concannon. Gorgeous fish, everyone! March winners received gift vouchers to Steve Rybicki's AngelsPlus.

The May photo contest featured Koi, and the winners were top notch! May winners are 1st place-Mario Toromanovic; 2nd & 3rd place-Ted Santos. Really impressive Koi's there! May winners received gift vouchers to Doug Hundley's North Star Angels.

The July photo contest submissions are now closed and voting is almost over. The theme was "biggest" angelfish. How can you tell how big the fish in the photo is?
You've got to tape a ruler vertically on the tank before you take the picture.

Stay tuned to the TAS website for the announcement of the winners!



The September photo contest will be starting shortly. The theme is leopards. If you've got some leopards, why not get out your camera and start taking pictures? You'll be ready to submit them when the contest begins.

I encourage you to check out past winners on the Photo Contest page. There are some gorgeous fish there.

I invite members to voice any comments, suggestions or concerns about the photo contests. Please feel free to contact me via the Photo Contest Committee weblink, photocommittee@theangelfishsociety.org.

November contest – blushings.

Dangers of Bloodworms

by Tamar Stephens August 2008

Do you feed your fish Bloodworms?

Many of us feed our angelfish blood worms because we know bloodworms are a nutritious, protein-rich supplement to their diet. Furthermore, our angelfish seem to love bloodworms and will feed on them enthusiastically.

However, whether you feed your angelfish freeze-dried, frozen, or live blood worms, you may be putting your life or the lives of your family members in danger! When you feed your angelfish blood worms, do your eyes start itching, and do you start sneezing and get a runny nose? Do you sometimes get wheezy and/or short of breath, or even get full blown asthma? When you touch frozen or live blood worms, or when you clean your tanks, do you get itchy red welts on your forearms? Are you taking an allergy medicine regularly just to control these symptoms?
I started reading up on this topic because I started getting symptoms of allergies when handling blood worms. I found out that I am not the only one who has allergic reactions. Here are some comments from various tropical fish forums:

"My eyes get real bloodshot and last time they even got puffy."

"I get itchy, watery eyes, running nose."

"My hands and face come out in these white lumps and my skin itches."

My son fed my fish…bloodworms (live).Within an hour his eyes were red and streaming and his lips were swollen. About 30 minutes after that he had white bumps under his eyes. After feeding the fish he washed his hands as usual."

If you feed your fish blood worms, freeze-dried, frozen or live, and you have any of these symptoms, you are probably allergic to them. If you are not allergic, others in your household may be, or may develop allergies with continued exposure.

WHAT ARE BLOOD WORMS?

Blood worms are chironomid larvae. Chironomids are insects that closely resemble mosquitoes. They are often called "non-stinging" mosquitoes. The larvae are aquatic and the hemoglobin in their body fluids makes them red colored. Thus they are commonly called "bloodworms." Chironomids are found in watery areas, particularly in the Sudan, Egypt, Japan and the U.S.A. They are a common cause of respiratory allergies in these areas.
ALLERGY STUDIES Allergies develop in response to repeated exposure to an agent. For example, the first time someone is exposed to ragweed pollen, that person will rarely show an allergic response. However, after repeated exposures, some people will become "sensitized" to ragweed, and will have allergic reactions that may get worse year after year. The same thing can happen with exposure to bloodworms and to other fish food ingredients.

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Bloodworms contain a very potent allergen, so anyone who has other allergies is at high risk of developing allergies to blood worms.
In one article, the author discusses that skin prick tests have shown people to be allergic to chironomids in areas such as parts of Europe where they are not naturally found (Aldunate, et al, 1999). In a study conducted by this author, five people with severe allergies were given skin prick tests

to test for sensitivity to blood worms and to four different commercial brands of fish food.
The results showed that four of the people were allergic to chironomids and one was allergic to Tetramin® brand of fish food. The person who was allergic to the fish food was also found to be allergic to mollusks and crustaceans. Mollusks are animals such as snails and clams. Crustaceans are animals such as shrimp and lobsters. The list of ingredients for Tetramin® includes shrimp meal. Four of these people had developed their symptoms after getting home aquariums, and one in response to handling live bait that he called “bloodworms.”
Another study reports on skin prick tests to test a variety of potential allergens (Erikson, et al, 2000). These tests were given to over 2000 people from 8 countries. Chironomids were not the focus of this study, but one of the observations made was that positive skin tests to chironomids were found in 12% of the patients with aquariums at home, and in 9% of people who had formerly had aquariums.

In another study in Egypt, 25 children with respiratory allergies were given skin-prick tests for various substances including chironomids and house dust mites.

The study found that 20 of the children were positive for chironomid allergy but only three of those 20 were also allergic house dust mites. (Morsey, et al, 2000) This study has interesting implications. Most of us are aware of the potential for allergic reactions, including asthma, from house dust mites.

If our children or other family members have respiratory allergies or asthma, we wash bedding in hot water, put special covers on our pillows and mattresses, get rid of carpeting, and take other measures to eliminate house dust mites from our homes. Not many people are aware that if they keep an aquarium and feed their fish bloodworms, their allergic family members may be reacting to the bloodworms or to other fish food components instead of to the house dust mites.

WHAT CAUSES THE ALLERGIC REACTION?

So what are people allergic to in blood worms? Allergies are a reaction to a foreign protein. With blood worms, a particular polypeptide sequence on hemoglobin is what people react to. (Polypeptides are strings of amino acids that are used to build protein molecules. Hemoglobin is the protein on red blood cells that transports oxygen.) I would like to point out that allergic reactions can be quite severe. In the Aldunate study, three of the five patients studied had required emergency treatment on one or more occasions due to the severity of their reactions, described as “severe bronchiospasm” or “bronchial asthma.” In extreme cases, some people react to allergens with anaphalaxis (an"ah-filak'sis).

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The allergic reaction is rapid and strong, with the swelling blocking your ability to breathe. We are more familiar with anaphalaxis as an allergic reaction to bee or wasp stings. Without immediate medical intervention, someone may die within minutes.

Someone who is known to be allergic to bees will carry an “epi-pen” to administer an emergency dose of epinephrine to counteract the anaphalaxis. Allergic reactions are unpredictable. You might go for a long time with manageable reactions, then suddenly, without warning, experience bronchiospasm or anaphalaxis.

HOW CAN YOU PROTECT YOURSELF FROM BLOODWORM ALLERGIES?

If you have allergic reactions to handling fish food, and you get allergy testing, be sure to get tested for seafood items (mollusks and crustaceans), and for chironomids. Chironomids might get overlooked if you don’t ask specifically for it, as many allergy specialists are not aware of the potency of this potential allergen.

Here are some specific things you can do to minimize exposure.

Read the labels on fish food you buy. If you have a choice between two brands, select one that does not have the specific allergens that you are sensitive to.

When you handle fish food, always wash carefully with soap and water afterwards.

Handle fish food with care. Try not to stir up dust, breathe dust, or touch your eyes, nose, or mouth until you have washed away any potential dust. Use a dust mask when feeding fish, and wear protective gloves to when feeding and when doing water changes and other tank maintenance.

Of course, the simple answer for protecting yourself from blood worm allergies is to simply not feed your fish blood worms. If you or anyone else in your home has chronic respiratory allergic symptoms or has asthma, there is a good chance that you or your family members either are allergic to bloodworms or will develop an allergy with repeated exposure.

You would be smarter to look for other nutritious foods to supplement your angelfish’s diet. Alternative fish foods will be the subject of a future article.

REFERENCES Aldunate, M.T.; S. Echichipia; B. Gomez; B.E. Garcia; J.M. Olaguibel; A. Rodriguez; I. Moneo; and A.I. Tabar. “Chironomids and other causes of fish food allergy. Alergol Inmunol Clin, June 1999, Vol. 14, No. 3, pp. 140-145. Eriksson, Nils E.; Christian Moeller; Jan AkeWihl; Marius Zolubas. “Skin prick tests and IgE determinations with common inhalant allergens.” Published in Lithuanian in Vaiku Pulmonologija ir Alergologija. No. 3, 2000. (My son found this translated into English on a website – but I don’t have the URL – Tamar)

Morsey, T. A.; Saleh, W. A.; Farrag, A. M.; Rifaat, M. M. “Chironomid potent allergens causing respiratory allergy in children.” Journal Egypt Soc. Parasitology. 30: 83-92, 2000.