

In Depth

January-February 2017

[Shop Hop in SoCal](#)

[NEC's Historic First Weekend Workshop](#)

[Editorial: Successful Independent Shops](#)

[Fish Room Tour](#)

[Calendar of Coming Events](#)

and so much more!



Geophagus steindachneri. photo by David Banks, Jr

In Depth

published by The Tropical Fish Club of Burlington

Established February 1989



We meet on the second Thursday of each month, September through June, at 6:30 PM at the VFW Hall, 73 Pearl St, Essex Junction, VT.

Our membership consists of adults, children and teens. Many members are very experienced and have been keeping fish for years, and others are just getting started. People of all ages and experience levels are always welcome. Meet and learn from those who share your interests!

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From the President

by David L Banks, Jr



I loved reading Ann's editor column in the December issue. We really do try to make a best impression when "showing off" our fish rooms to other hobbyists. Sometimes it is just a quick pick up the floor so nobody trips on anything, to a much needed overall, straightening out and thorough cleaning. Your fishroom looked great, Ann! I need to spend about a month straight, cleaning up mine, but will probably never really get there.

The holiday meeting was a great success as we ate a great variety of dishes topped off with a nice Dakin Farms ham. There was a Yankee swap, seems Bryan Goodkowsky was the only one getting items stolen though! Congrats to Janine for winning the trivia contest, and, no, I did not share any questions with her ahead of time. There were prizes for 2nd and 3rd places, also, and additional prizes for non-winning scores. What really surprised me was how few people knew that Vermont was the 14th state, the first state after the original 13 colonies. Now you all know, maybe that question will come up again!

We have a board meeting scheduled to discuss 2017 events, so not much is finalized at this point. Watch the web site, Facebook page and the Yahoo group mailing list for details as they become available. We have lots planned for this year and I don't want anyone to miss out. I've included links below to those if you are not sure where to find club info. See you all Thursday January 12th at the VFW in Essex Junction for our first meeting of the year!

TFCB web site - www.tfc.org

How to signup for Yahoo group - <http://www.tfc.org/2007/07/08/tfc-mailing-list/>

Facebook page - <https://www.facebook.com/TropicalFishClubBurlington/>

NEC web site - <http://northeastcouncil.org/NewNEC/>

David



Editorial

Successful Independent Fish Stores

By Ann Whitman

My sister, Joan, and I have traveled and visited quite a few fish stores together over the years, as well as attended numerous hobby events. Back in the 1980s, we also worked in pet stores—managing fish departments. We have a long relationship with this industry.

I have also worked, written about, and taught in the garden center industry, which is a parallel universe to the aquarium hobby, with similar lessons and history. Like anyone who has kept fish for more than a few decades, as we have, we've seen the hobby change, especially the number and type of stores that sell fish and equipment. A recent trip to California really got us thinking and talking about what's happened to small, independent shops and why so many closed their doors and why some continue to thrive.

Mass Market Competition

Obviously, many of the shops throughout the country succumbed to competition from big-box pet stores and on-line sellers. In many cases, the shops that didn't make it were stuck in the past. The owners were unable to see and embrace the new technologies and ways of doing business. They couldn't win on price and failed to find a unique niche in the market. The old-fashioned stores still exist in areas with either the population density to support them or in areas that are too rural to attract the mega-retailers. We saw that in Southern California, where some of those shops survive, for better or worse, at least for now. (See article on [page 7](#).)

Selling and Servicing the Dream

But the best of the stores we've visited have moved with the times; their owners embrace aquascaping, rimless tanks, updated lighting and CO₂ technology, and clean, customer-friendly store design. In these stores, many aquariums are works of art and showcases for living design, not just glass boxes for commodity fish. They use display tanks to inspire customers, and carry all the tools and expertise needed to make the dream come true. On my travels in Europe, I saw shops that devoted significant space to customer education and comfort with seating areas, libraries, and video screens. The best also had work stations where customers can plan out their rock and driftwood designs before buying.

Relationships Mean Survival

Unlike the big-box stores, successful local fish stores develop relationships with their customers. They have experts on staff who know their fish and technology, just as the old-fashioned stores did, and they know your name. Their buyers seek out uncommon fish and plants from a variety of wholesalers, and promote them to their customers. Some send out Facebook messages when new shipments arrive. Others are even more personal. For example, I love getting a text message from a local shop that lets me know when they have something that I might like. "Hey, Ann, I just got in some Mega Clown plecos you were looking for." The best shops also take special orders and buy fish regularly from local breeders at fair prices. They work with the local fish clubs. The mass retailers cannot compete with that level of service, and that's where the independent shops will find their niche. It's possible for local shops to survive, but it takes a combination of old-fashioned fish expertise, personal service, and modern thinking to thrive against the competition. It can be done—we've seen what success looks like.



Club Meetings and Events

by Ann Whitman

photos by David Banks, Jr

Our December meeting is traditionally a holiday party at a club member's house, and this year was no exception. About a dozen of us met at Ann Whitman's house in Bolton for a potluck ham dinner. Livy's green salad, Janine's fruit and jello salad and candied sweet potatoes were very popular. Don made baked squash, Bryan brought an excellent punch. Dave Isham brought a huge, excellent blueberry pie and Ira served his signature peanut butter rice crispy bars. I don't recall who brought the banana bread, but our family enjoyed the leftovers of that with cream cheese the next day.

Before and after dinner, Ann led tours of her basement [fish room](#) and tanks in the living and dining rooms. We enjoyed David's annual quiz, which led to plenty of good-natured second guessing. The Yankee swap saw more stealing action than some in the recent past. A package of Dakin Farms pulled pork and Cabot smoked cheese changed hands a few times, before ending up in the Banks' tote bag. Historically, good wine, beer, and food items tend to be the most popular and regularly "stolen" in our swaps. Remember that for next year!



Kristi, Livy and Ira get a look at Ann's tanks in the basement.



Dave and Joan in the fish room.



Kristi, Livy, Dave, Ira and Ann talk fish in the kitchen during the meal preparation.



Ann explains the contents of a few tanks.

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Shop Hop in SoCal

By Ann Whitman

When I visited family in the Los Angeles area with my sister, Joan, we naturally looked for a few local fish stores. It's always interesting to see shops in other parts of the country, even if we aren't buying fish. We attended the All-Aquarium Catfish Conference right before our trip, so we asked the California attendees for tips on which shops to seek out. We also did some online research and made a short list. We ended up going to about half a dozen shops throughout the area. Intimidating traffic and travel time kept us from seeing more!

Nature Aquarium, Santa Monica

Our first shop, on our way from LAX airport to our hotel, was the [Nature Aquarium](#) store in Santa Monica. This small shop features many beautifully planted tanks, from small waterfall and nano tanks to a huge, showpiece aquarium with a mature aquascape and shoals of fish. They are a distributor for Aqua Design Amano products and carry a large selection of plants and a good variety of small schooling fish and shrimp. We noted that all the tanks on display and for sale were rimless—a trend we saw throughout our CA shopping trips. We had a good visit with the proprietor, who knew Takashi Amano personally and even attended his funeral. On our parting, he gave me a copy of *The Book of Aqua Design Amano* as a gift.

Oranda Aquarium, West Hollywood

Another excellent shop we visited is [Oranda Aquarium](#). We had some trouble finding it, since Google maps sent us to its former location. It was worth seeking out, however. They had nicely planted tanks, plus a great selection of fresh and saltwater fish, plants, rocks, wood and equipment. I didn't get any photos there, but you can see plenty on yelp where they have a 4-star rating.

Less Noteworthy Shops

Near the end of our trip, we drove up to the Pasadena area and went to a couple of less impressive shops. I won't mention names, but one looked like it was going out of business, with a wall of empty tanks, dusty merchandise, and a limited selection of fish. This shop was a crowded, narrow, hole-in-the-wall place that reminded us of an old-fashioned, but out-of-date, pet store, complete with the smell of birds and rodents. The second store was as spacious as a warehouse, but the set up and tanks looked more like a wholesaler than retailer. More than half of the floor space was devoted to dry goods with stuff piled everywhere. They had tons of equipment and tanks from many, many manufacturers, with



Nature Aquarium in Santa Monica, CA, was our first stop. The owner specializes in Takashi Amano-inspired aquascapes and supplies.



Waterfall tanks can mimic "edge" environments where fish feel most comfortable. They often feature mosses.

spare parts for every filter and fish appliance ever made. This place is clearly popular with pond keepers and they had koi and large goldfish in huge vats. While they had a good selection of fish, tanks were bare and some maintenance was clearly lacking. The shopkeeper didn't seem particularly interested in his customers or fish. The bettas in this place were lying on their sides in less than an inch of water, for example. I refilled a dozen or so when the shopkeeper was occupied elsewhere with a customer.

After those disappointing shops, we drove to West Covina to visit [CK Fish World](#), which was scheduled to host a [SCAPE](#) (Southern California Aquatic Plant Enthusiasts) meeting the following day. This was easily our favorite shop and worth the drive northeast. It was a Saturday and the place



CK Fish World in West Covina was our favorite shop with a great selection of well-kept fish, plants and supplies.



Keeping large numbers of black ghost knife fish encourages their natural behavior.

was bustling with 5 or 6 staff on hand. They sell fresh and saltwater fish, and shrimp, and have a great selection of each. I was impressed that most of the freshwater tanks used sponge filters, and nearly all the fish in the shop appeared very healthy.

We saw plenty of rare species, such as panda loaches, and at least half a dozen different shrimps. They had a good selection of unusual bettas, too, which were quite tempting. (A weakness, I admit.) I was impressed that they keep a large number of each species; 15 4-inch black ghost knife, for example,



Custom cabinets gave the store a very tidy, upscale look. Most tanks used Poret foam filters for biological filtration.



The well-stocked shop sold a wide variety of fish and shrimp, both fresh and saltwater.

instead of the two or three you see in a typical shop. When kept in larger numbers, fish exhibit more natural behavior. Their fish labeling system was great, too. Each large, easy-to-read label had a photo of the fish, common and Latin name, size, temperament, feeding, and price.

For inspiration, the shop had quite a few nicely aquascaped tanks of all sizes, including waterfall paludariums. Their selection of wood, stone, tanks and equipment was impressive, too, making it easy and tempting to design your own.



Healthy fish were clearly comfortable in their well-thought-out environments. Discus had a large, deep tank with a rock wall. Rams enjoyed plenty of hiding space among the driftwood and artificial plants.

We were excited to see some rare fish, such as these panda loaches. Tempting, but we resisted.

In preparation for the SCAPE meeting, they also had tons of very nice plants, both tissue culture and conventional, and were offering significant discounts on live and dry goods to SCAPE members in attendance. (They expected about 100 people and were setting up a tent in the parking lot



Like all the better shops we visited, CK sold and used a good variety of rimless tanks, driftwood and rocks for aquascaping. They even had a band saw to cut stone and corals on the spot.

for the auction.) Joan and I joined SCAPE online, but ended up not being able to attend the event. The owner extended the discounts to us anyway and we bought dragon stone, spider wood, plants and even a small low-iron glass tank for photography work. It complicated our packing for the flight home, but no regrets!

Hobby History

NEC Workshops/Conventions

By David L Banks, Jr

I am the Northeast Council of Aquarium Societies (NEC) historian, and have been trying to sort through the many unorganized boxes of history that I have. In 2015, for the 40th NEC Annual Convention, I posted some history of the convention. I would just like to expand on that this month.

The first NEC Workshop, as they were known for the first 21 years, took place in Westport, CT, on May 22-23, 1976, at the Nature Center where the Norwalk Aquarium Society holds their meetings and shows/auctions. It was a joint effort by the NEC and the Mid-Atlantic Aquarium Council. I am including a scan of the program, an article that appeared in Aquarium News in August of that year, and a write-up by Penny Faul who became the driving force and chairman of the event for 20 years. Also, a few tidbits from the 25th anniversary convention program that related some personal experiences for a few long time attendees.



Program of the first weekend workshop is a who's who of the Northeast fish world. Note the prices from 1976!

The article in Aquarium News was written by Tony Terceira who was also one of the speakers at the first workshop and someone who you all probably still know today as a speaker on killifish and photography. This was also the first time our own Wayne Liebel spoke at any convention, but of course it would not be his last! The last speaker I would like to mention is Lee Finley. Lee has spoken at more NEC conventions than any other speaker, closely followed by Wayne and Tony for the number of times they presented. We were, and still are, very lucky to have talented speakers like this living in the Northeast!

After the first one, the convention has been held at various hotels in Massachusetts and Connecticut

over the last 40-plus years with a very long run at the Hartford Marriott in Farmington, CT. The list of speakers that have presented over the years is very impressive. For some speakers, the NEC was their first convention presentation and they have gone on to become very sought-after speakers. Others were already very well known, and many somewhere in between. The convention has always had a good balance of speakers covering wide and diverse topics and draws hobbyists with many different interests, as well.

Janine and I attended our first NEC workshop in 1987. We had been somewhat involved with clubs in southern New England, attending their annual events, and everyone said we needed to attend this workshop! We were trying to do this as inexpensively as possible this first year and had a friend going to school just a few miles from there, so we contacted her to see if we could sleep there that weekend. We quickly learned, however, that staying at the hotel is as important a part of the convention experience as any other.

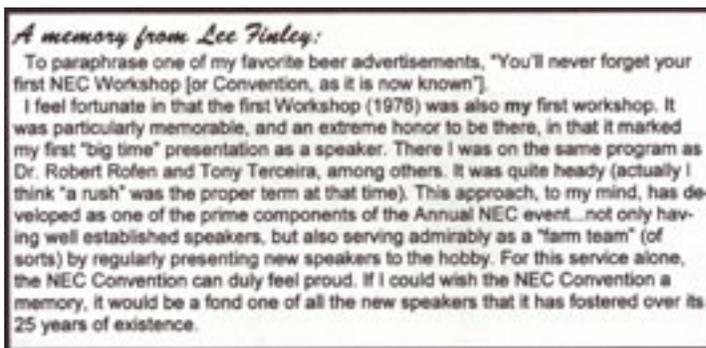
This year the convention will be held March 10-12 in Rocky Hill, CT. There is so much to offer hobbyists at these conventions that I'm not sure it can be adequately explained on paper.

First is the amazing gathering of top hobbyists from all over the Northeast and beyond, all willing to talk and share their information, and fish too! So much information is casually passed at these conventions, and many lifelong friendships started and continued, too.

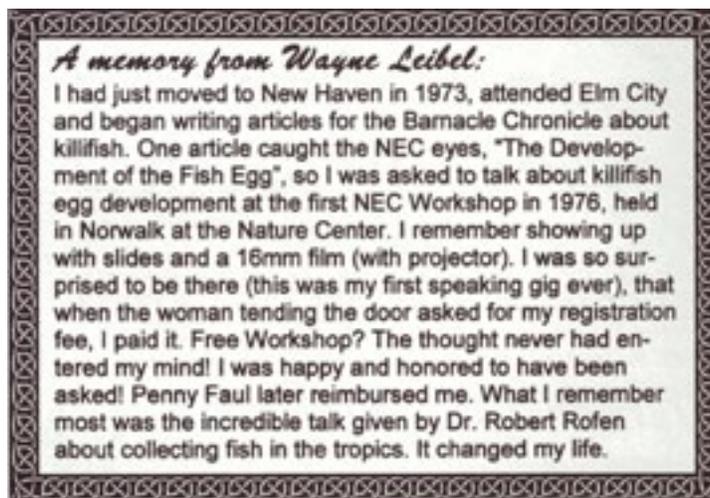
The speaker presentation is also something special, as many top hobbyists and scientists present on a wide range of topics. Even if you don't think you would be interested in a topic, it is always worth seeing someone talk about a subject they have a special interest in. You may be surprised!

And there are the fish, plants and everything else fish related available to see and buy. There is a vendor room, auctions, fish shows, club table sales, raffles, all great opportunities to bring home something new. The meals, and banquets specifically, offers a more social atmosphere and a chance to recognize those that have contributed to the overall success through participation in the various activities of the clubs and council. The breeders, photographers, writers and those that show fish at the club shows are among those recognized. What would the clubs be if it were not for these hobbyists?

We have told so many people over the years, once you go to your first convention, you will be hooked and want to return every year! So if you have not been yet, we hope you attend your first of many soon. And for the rest of us, we will see you at [this year's convention!](#)



[Lee Finley](#) was one of the speakers at the first NEC weekend workshop and remembers it as his first big time presentation.



[Wayne Leibel](#) shared his memories of the first NEC "weekend workshop" that later came to be known as the NEC Convention.

Northeast Council and Mid-Atlantic Council Week-end Workshop Report
by Penny Faul

Wes Clifford, Al and myself went to our first annual week-end workshop. We arrived at noontime at Westport, Conn. Nature Center for Environmental Activities. We registered and proceeded to enjoy the workshop for Saturday. The workshops for Saturday were as follows: "The fish - its development from egg to adult" speaker was Wayne Liebel who is studying ~~Ichthyology~~ Ichthyology at Yale University.

"Why you can't raise good show guppies" speakers were Robert Maxwell and Michael Regent who are Senior Judges of the International X Federation of Guppy Assn.

"Cichlids of Lake Malawi" speaker was Don Johnson who is publisher and editorial director of "Today's Aquarist" Magazine and the new elected President of the N.E.C. as well as the vice-President of N. A. C. X

"How to build your own all-glass aquarium" speaker was Henry Pease who is a professional builder of all-glass aquariums.

We then adjourned to the Holiday Inn in Norwalk to socialize and change for the evening. We met in the lobby at 6 p.m. and left as a caravan to the Westport New Englander, San Francisco Clubroom where we got to gather for cocktails and dinner. We had an attendance of 80 persons for this dinner. After an indelible delicious dinner we had the pleasure of having Dr. Robert Rosen as a speaker his topic was "My collecting trip to the Orinoco River Basin. Dr. Robert Rosen is President of Kordon Corp and former Curator of fishes at the Philadelphia Museum. He also left plenty of free samples of Deit-15 and Ocean Plankton both the new fish foods of the future if you haven't try them then you are missing out on the best.

After our beautiful evening we returned to the Holiday Inn at Mid-night and had an all night pool party (In-door heated). Others ~~WENT~~ went up to room 508 for all night slides!!!!!!

Morning came earlier than usual but everyone was up and ready to go again, we met at the J H O P for breakfast at 9 A.M. and then went on to the Nature Center Again for another day filled with fun and knowledge.

Sunday's workshop was "Bettas- the selection and breeding of Siamese fighting fish" speaker was George Jones who is a past president of International Betta Congress and a well known breeder and judge.

"Cichlids of Lake Tanganyika" speaker was Lee Finley who is a professional breeder and his articles and photographs have appeared in several publications.

"Success with Salt Water" - Speaker was Dr. John Miklosz who is publisher and editor of "Marine Aquarist" Magazine.

"Killifish-Their Care and Breeding" speaker was Tony Jaccaria who is chairman of judging and standards and Secretary of the A. K. A. He is also an author of "Killifish-Their Care and Breeding"!

The final event of the Week-End was a Giant Auction where you could purchase several good bargains everything from fish equipment of charcoal carbon to breeding traps, from swordfish to rare Cichlids. Everyone at the auction went home with an armful of useful fish equipment and fish.

Refreshment were available throughout the afternoon.

The total of persons attending the whole ~~workshop~~ Workshop was 200, it was such a great success that plans are already in the works for another one next year and we have plenty of good reasons to believe it will reach an attendance ~~of~~ of 800 persons, I hope that everyone in the E. A. S. will make a point of taking advantage of the most enjoyable and knowledgeable week-end.

Penny Faul, first chairwoman of the NEC weekend workshops, [reports on events](#) of that weekend. Remember typewriters?

My Fish Room Tour (in case you missed it)

By Ann Whitman

Our club members rarely visit each other's fish rooms, which may be typical for many clubs. So, I thought it would be fun to share my set up, especially for those who couldn't make it to the holiday party last month. Even for those who did visit recently, I have changed up a few things and added all my sister's fish to the mix, since she has shut down her tanks for the winter.

Overall, I now have three 30 longs, a 40 breeder, a 29, three 20H, an 18H, one 20L, four 15s, three 10s, and two 5-1/2 gallon tanks in the cellar fish room. Upstairs, I have a 40 breeder, two 10s, an 18 bowfront, a Fluval Chi and Spec V scattered about the living and dining rooms and kitchen.

All tanks are planted and contain driftwood and Poret foam filters. The 40s also have cannister and hang-on-the-back filters to keep up with the bioload from all the plecós. All the 30s and 20s also have HOB filters. I've got a pvc central air system driven by a Jehmco air pump that drives all the foam filters and air stones. One line even extends through the ceiling to a row of tanks in the kitchen. Most tanks have sand substrate, but a few have 1/4-inch round natural gravel.

Here are a few of the highlights:



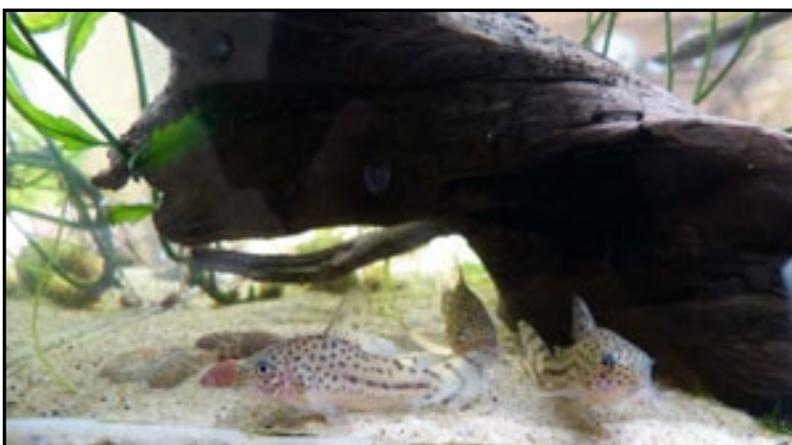
Corydoras gossei and *C. schwartzi* share another 10-gallon in the kitchen with a group of juvenile *Pelvicachromis taeniatus* Lokundje.



The Fluval Spec V sits in front of a window in the dining room and houses a trio of *Centromochlus perugiae* woodcats and school of *Corydoras pygmaeus*.

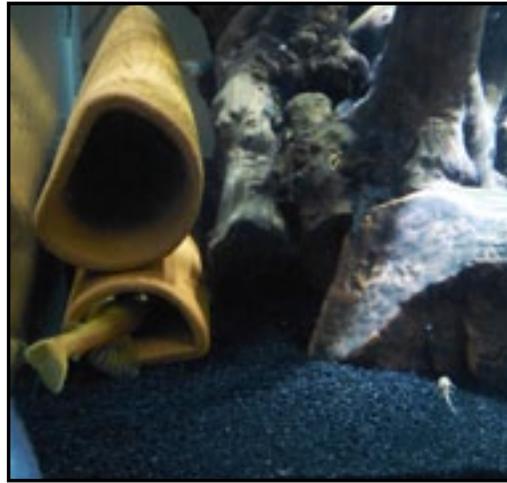


Golden mystery snails enjoy a chunk of cucumber in one of the kitchen aquariums. They share the tank with *Corydoras knaacki* and *C. habrosus* and female betta.





The 40-gallon breeder in the living room is decorated with driftwood and plants. It was designed for shoals of rasboras, tetras and pencil fish, but recently a group of suckermouth catfish have taken up residence. My sister's blue phantom, a pair of royal farlowellas, a whiptail and my new pair of *Spatuloricaria* share the space.



One of the newly added 34-gallon tanks under the cellar stairs was set up to house *Ancistrus*. This breeding colony contains a mix of super red, brown and calico colors with long fins and normal fins. On the right, a male sits in the lower cave, fanning a clutch of newly laid eggs.



Racks of 20H, 30L and 15 gallon tanks along the back wall (left). The upper 30-gallon (right) under the stairs is set up for a school of 20 Sidmunkthi loaches and shoals of *Corydoras robiniae* and albino *C. sterbai*.



The 40B on the back wall has a permanent group of serpae tetras, mega clown plecos and *Corydoras aeneus*. It's the winter home of large royal and gold nugget plecos, a small school of yellow congo tetras, and a tropical water lily. The 30L below this tank has a breeding pair of *Cryptoheros chetumalensis*, but they were hiding on picture day.



Two 20H tanks contain half-black angels, cardinal tetras, *Corydoras concolor*, calico ancistrus (left), and *Apistogramma cacatuoides* Triple Red (right). Not shown: *C. lamberti*, *C. sterbai*, several goby species, kyathit danios and *Epiplatys roloffi*.



15 gallon tanks along the back wall include a grow out tank for ancistrus (left) and a set up for a breeding pair *Pelvicachromis taeniatus* Lokunge, currently hiding (right).



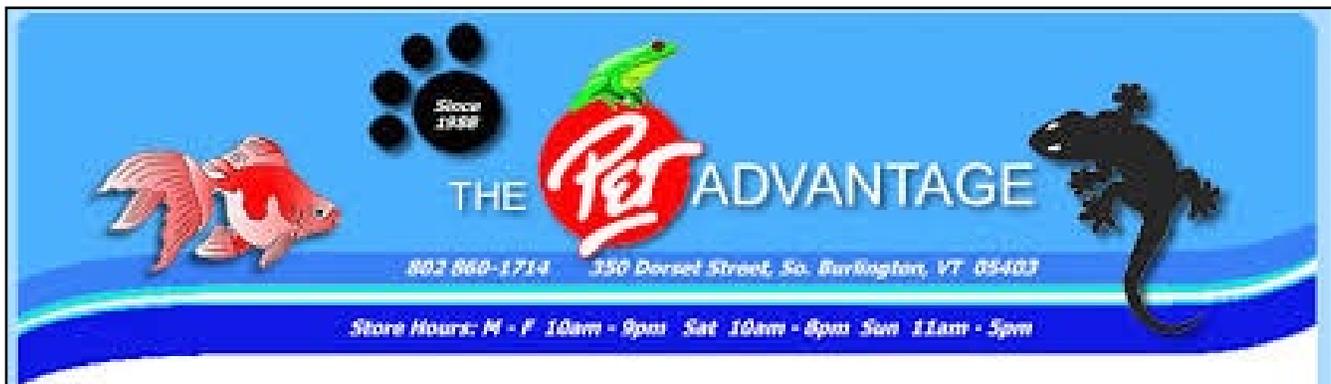
An 18H tank (left) contains a precious school of 14 sunset tetras, green laser corydoras, and Philippine blue angels. A 29-gallon holds a group of *Cryptoheros nanoluteus* (upper right), a large school of emperor tetras, checkerboard barbs, gold laser and *Corydoras similis*. The 20L under the stairs has *Corydoras C141* (lower right), *Fp gardneri*, and blue angels.



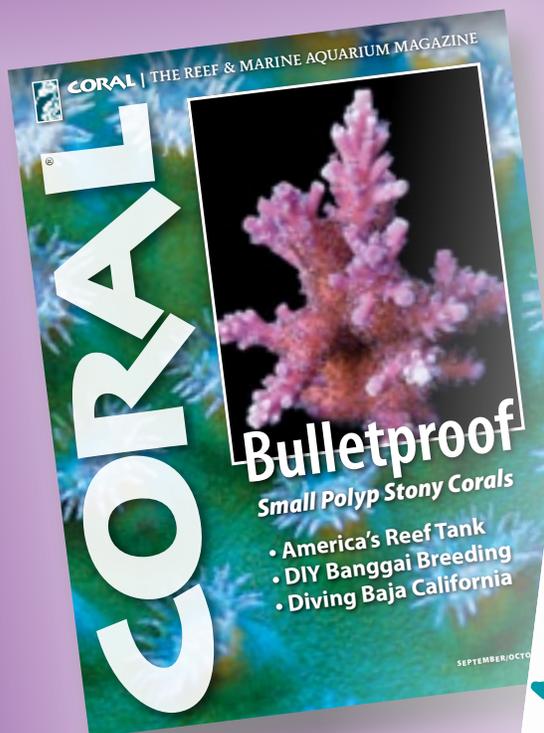
15-gallon tanks hold *C. weitzmani* and *C. loxozonus*, juvenile *P. taeniatus* and pairs of *Epiplatys fasciolatus* (left) and *Ivanacara adoketa* (right).

CALENDAR OF COMING EVENTS

Jan 12	TFCB meeting, 6:30, VFW, Essex Jct, VT
Jan 15	Danbury Area Aquarium Society auction, Carmel, NY
Feb 19	PVAS Tropical Fish auction, Chicopee, MA
Feb 25	Tropical Fish Society of RI , spring auction, Cumberland, RI
Feb 26	Norwalk Aquarium Society , spring auction, Westport, CT
March 10 - 12	NEC 42nd Annual Convention , Rocky Hill, CT
March 10 - 12	Capitol Cichlid Association, Big Fish Deal #5 , Gaithersburg, VA
March 25	NH Aquarium Society auction, Portsmouth, NH
April 23	New Jersey Aquarium Society , Spring auction, East Brunswick, NJ
April 23	New England Cichlid Assoc , auction, Windsor Locks, CT
April 28 - 30	Aquatic Gardeners Association Convention , Denver, CO
April 29	Central NY Aquarium Society , annual auction, Syracuse, NY
May 4 - 7	American Livebearers Association Convention , St. Louis, MO
May 6	Boston Guppy Group, meeting and auction, location TBA
May 12	Brooklyn Aquarium Society Giant Spring auction, Brooklyn, NY
May 21	OVAS , annual auction, Rutland, VT
May 26	American Killifish Association Convention , Northbrook, IL
June 8 - 13	North American Native Fishes Assoc. Convention , Missouri
July 13 - 16	American Cichlid Association Convention , Novi, MI
August 25 - 27	Marine Aquarium Conference of North America , New Orleans, LA
Nov 3 - 5	Aquatic Experience , Chicago, IL



“Wow!”



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