

THE BEGINNER'S BUCKET

Bringing 'em Back Alive

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You've heard the old saw, "Don't put all your eggs in one basket." It's not a good idea to ship all your fish in the same Styrofoam container, either. Several years ago, B. G. Granier called to let me know that his local post office called him to pick up what were the fish I had shipped him, but what had become a flattened, stinking box that was too foul for postal employees to handle.

Whether they literally get flattened, or just sit in the sun for too long, the fish we ship don't always make it alive to where we send them. This is really disappointing if you've traveled to some far location to collect your specimens, and aren't likely to get back to that collecting spot anytime soon.

Last April, I took a trip to southern Florida. I was only about an hour away from Florida International University, so I called Joel Trexler to take him up on his offer to go out into the Everglades. It was a fantastic trip. Joel set us up with ear muffs and life vest, and brought us out in an airboat, through the clear waters and saw grass. We also collected some exquisite bluefin killifish and American flagfish.

I knew it would be a long time before I got back to the Everglades again, so I took extra pains to ensure that at least some of the fish would make it to my home alive. I didn't have any plastic bags with me, so I improvised, shipping each fish in a plastic drinking-water bottle filled about one-eighth full. The bottles are much stronger than plastic bags and less likely to break. I bought two Styrofoam containers at a convenience store and shipped the fish back to Pierre Gagne, a NANFA member who lives near my house.

As a precaution against postal Styro-smashing, I took some fish home in a picnic cooler, stowed in the back of my van. At each hotel stop I filled an ice bucket with tap water, and let it age overnight to let the chlorine evaporate. The next day I used the aged water to replace a quarter of the water in the cooler.

This worked fine until I stopped in Charleston, South Carolina. The next evening, when I stopped in Raleigh, North Carolina, all of the fish had died. I didn't have a pH test kit with me, but I doubt the fish died of pH shock or a radical shift in water conductivity. Pierre speculated that the fish had died of chloramine poisoning. He said that most municipal water companies were now adding chloramine to their tap water. Unlike chlorine, chloramine is stable in tap water for more than 30 days. My water company apparently is one of the few that doesn't add it.

The next time I take a long trip, I'll be sure to bring along a bottle of commercial chloramine remover. It's not a bad idea to add a little ammonia remover to the water before shipping fish. If the fish had been feeding heavily before collecting, ammonia might reach perilous levels in a small shipping container. Likewise, an all-purpose antibacterial medication is a good idea, to knock out any smoldering infections that might flare up in fish stressed out by capture and shipping.

When I got home, I was glad I'd hedged my bets. All the fish I shipped to Pierre had made it there alive—preventing the trip from being a total washout. 🐟

Mark your calendars!

2004 NANFA Convention

June 17-20, 2004 🌿 Riverbanks Zoo, Columbia, SC

NANFA's South Carolina contingent invites you to next year's event, featuring Dr. Robert Goldstein (*American Aquarium Fishes*) as banquet speaker. Lodging info, costs, and schedule of events will be available soon. Contact Chip Rinehart (ipchay61@aol.com), Fritz Rohde (Fritz.Rohde@ncmail.net) or Dustin Smith (dsmith73@hotmail.com) if you have any questions. See you in South Carolina!