

CRICKETS: THE IDEAL FOOD

By Charles F. Glut

Reprinted from Killie Notes

I imagine that just about everyone who has ever dropped a fish hook into a quiet pool of water soon learns that crickets are highly regarded by fish as a tasty morsal. Why not feed them to your killifish? Well, for one reason, they are much too large (about 1-1½ inches long) and chopping these bugs to enable small killies to eat them is quite messy. Besides, full grown crickets are rather hard shelled - - so, I scrapped that idea.

Well, the obvious alternative to this, I reasoned, was to feed "baby" crickets to the fish. I was quite surprised to find that raising and feeding these insects to my fish was remarkably simple compared, for example, to wingless fruit flies (*Drosophila*). In fact, I am now convinced that anyone trying out my method of raising and feeding crickets will never again fool around with fruit flies because of the well known drawbacks that the latter food offer.

You do not need any messy, complicated and expensive culture mediums or sterile bottles, and it is not necessary to follow the many ridiculous steps that are required with fruit fly cultures. All you need is an old jar, a fish tank or a goldfish bowl, a few handfuls of sphagnum moss, a box of Gerber's Oatmeal, and some "starter" crickets or breeders.

I use the gray, soft bodied, Australian variety of cricket, because if they happen to escape, they won't damage anything. The local black variety, in comparison, is a "chewer". I find that the Australian type lends itself to reproduction to such an extent that it is truly amazing.

To start with, I dampen a large handful of sphagnum moss, squeeze it as dry as possible in my hands, and put it loosely into a 2 pound coffee can (about half full). The can is placed into the enclosure housing my mature breeder crickets and I leave it there for about three days in order to give them sufficient time to lay their eggs. Strips of cardboard are put up against the can, and into it, so that the crickets can get in and out readily.

After three days, I remove the can, chase out any crickets still in it, and dump the moss into a ten gallon empty tank which is kept between 70 and 80 degrees. The tank is covered with glass to maintain the humidity level while the eggs are incubating.

In from two to three weeks, depending on the temperature, the crickets hatch out, and I remove the glass cover for good, and start feeding the babies dry Gerber's oatmeal sparingly. A few drops of water are periodically added to the sphagnum moss to supply the crickets with necessary moisture. In about a week and a half they have grown large enough -- about the size of

fruit flies -- and they are ready for feeding to your average size killies. You can feed the smaller crickets to your fry, if you so desire.

To harvest them, I simply roll up stiff paper into one inch diameter tubes, six inches long, tape these to keep them from unraveling, and lay three or four on the bottom of the tank. The baby crickets, obligingly, crawl into the tubes and all one has to do is lift it out, put one end into a glass jar with the other end up, and tap it sharply with your finger and "presto" you have several hundred, to a thousand or more, depending on the size of the hatchery, pure and clean. They cannot climb up the sides of the jar, which makes it easy to control the distribution into each aquarium and they don't crawl out of the aquarium as fruit flies often do!

The fish thrive on them! I gave some to my good friend, John Tulipano, and I knew that he would give me an honest appraisal. He tried them on his South American annuals and reported that they all readily gulped them down. I have not been able to find a single species that won't eat them, and since it is no trick to hatch out one thousand or more using this method, you can have a good supply of food for all of your fish. Also, since the crickets grow slowly at first, you are able to feed for three or four weeks at an ideal size for most killies. They all eventually go into the tubes to hide, so you can harvest every last one, if you desire to do so, at any stage of growth.

With regards to shipping them during winter months, I am presently conducting exhaustive tests to determine what cricket eggs can stand. This is a time consuming project and it will be many months until I have even superficial answers. First results, however, indicate that they definitely cannot stand a hard freeze for twenty-four hours, even though the eggs are only twelve hours old. At higher temperatures, however, the results are more encouraging.

When the weather warms up I will try shipping these to anyone who would like to try them. I will probably place an ad in the fish and egg listing. If you are one-tenth as successful as I have been, you will be delighted, and so will your killies.

(Editor's note - This article was originally published in Killie Notes, the official publication of the American Killifish Association, under the title Crickets: The Ideal Killie Food. It is reprinted here for the benefit of NANFA members who are looking for an easy live food. Charles advertised his cricket eggs in the September, 1974 issue of the Fish and Egg listing. He quoted them at \$4.50 including postage. I don't know whether or not he still has them for sale. If interested, contact him at 2523 North Major Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60639.)