I'VE GOT KILLIE FRY! WHAT NOW?

Bob Meyer

One of the more common requests I get is a panicked request from someone on what to feed baby killies. The request usually comes from someone who was keeping killies/native fishes to look at and then all of a sudden they see baby fish (fry) in the aquarium with the parents. Or they have ordered some eggs on the internet, hatched out fry and then realized that they did not have food for the baby fish.

First of all, don't panic! If you are seeing fry in the tank with the parents, they probably have been feeding on infusoria that is in the tank, so they are getting fed. Infusoria are small single-celled organisms such as amoeba, euglena, and paramecium. And the term infusoria usually includes more complex organisms such as rotifers. If you just hatched out some fry, they usually have a yolk sack or there is infusoria in the water. So, they can get by for a day or two.

Keep in mind that cold-blooded animals such as fish need about one-tenth as much food as a warm-blooded animal. A fish might need as much food as the size of its eyeball at a single feeding. A baby fish does not need much food! More fry are killed by overfeeding then underfeeding!

I'm assuming that you have moved the fry to a small tank of their own. I suggest moving them and using some water from an established tank. That water probably has some infusoria in it. Next, I think that you should order some small live food such as vinegar eels (Figure 1), microworms (Figure 2), walter worms, banana worms, or brine shrimp eggs. You might also want to buy some small foods such as APR, fry-crack (Figure 3), golden pearls, or one of the other non-live foods to use if you can't get live foods. I have been told that OSI no longer manufacturers APR, but similar powdered small foods are still on the market. Here are some ideas to tide you over until you can get those foods!

Coffee filter infusoria! Take two coffee filters and double them up inside of a net. If you do not have coffee filters, use filter floss. Then do some figure 8 motions in an established tank. Then rinse these coffee filters into the tank that has the fry in it. You might catch some infusoria that are in your tank.

Java moss. Move some plants such as java moss into the fry tank. There may be infusoria on the java moss that the fry can eat (Figure 4).

Figure 1. Microworms (film on walls) cultured in oatmeal.

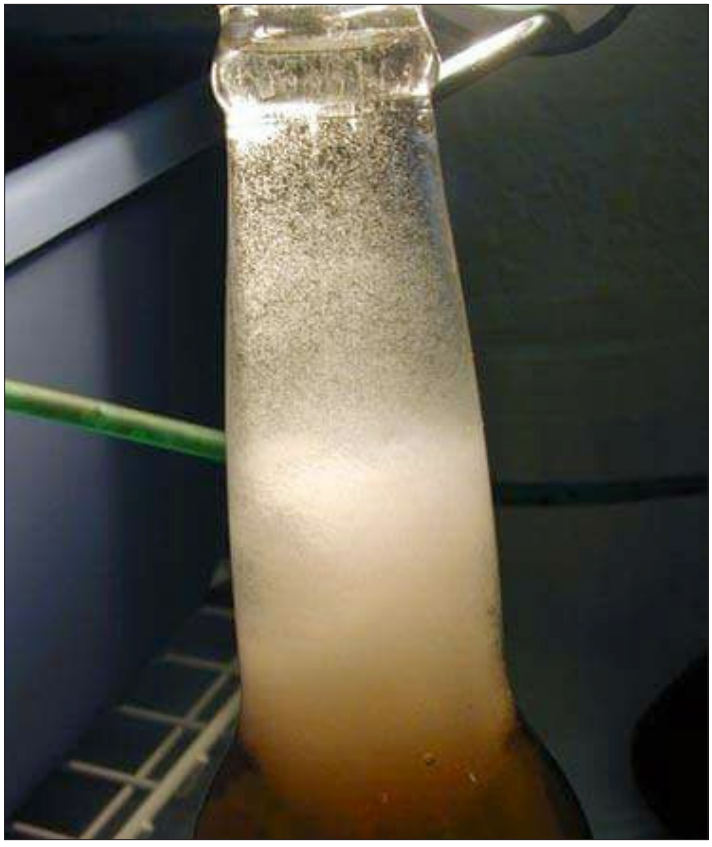

Figure 2. Vinegar Eels.

Photos by Anton Mitchell, Bryan Nelson, and Paul Procissi.

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Figure 3. Fry-crack fry food (55% protein).

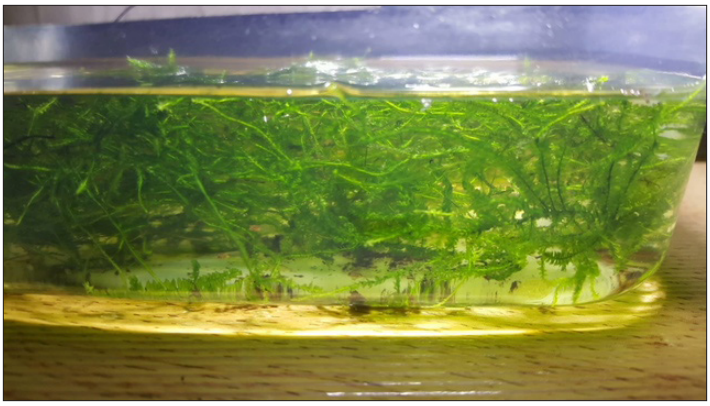

Figure 4. Fry tank with Java Moss habitat for infusoria.

Sponge filter! If you have a sponge filter set up in an existing tank, it probably has a good infusoria culture growing on it. Squeeze the filter into your fry container. A lot of debris/dirt will come out. But in that debris will be enough infusoria to get your fish by for a few days. If you have filter floss from a filter you can rinse that in the fry tank too!

Grow your own green water (Figure 5). This will actually take three to four days. Siphon debris out of the bottom of one of your tanks. Take this debris and a gallon of water and put it into a jar or vase in a very sunny warm place. In about a week to 10 days, you should have a good green-water culture. Green water is comprised of infusoria such as Euglena. Three to four days after you set this up, the water will still look clear, but will have enough infusoria in it that it can be used for feeding. The culture will turn a solid green at seven to ten days.

Lettuce leaf infusoria. This one will also take a few days. Take a quart jar and fill it with aquarium water. Add a piece of lettuce leaf the size of your thumb nail. Place in a sunny window. After about ten days, you will have a good infusoria culture. But after just three to four days, you might have enough to feed some fry. Do not use this culture if it smells bad. The foul odor is a sign of excess bacteria.

Figure 5. Green water culture of infusoria.

Mosquito rafts. Mosquitos lay their eggs in little rafts that look like soot. Put a bowl or bucket outside. Add a handful of grass. Add a spoonful of milk. In three to four days, you should have mosquito egg rafts floating on the water. Put these rafts into the fry container. The fry will eat the mosquito larvae. And the uneaten mosquito larvae will clean the water in the fry tank.

Bleached brine shrimp eggs. On the internet, you can find several methods of adding bleach to brine shrimp eggs. In effect, this weakens the shell and allows the brine shrimp to hatch faster (Figure 6). Often, these eggs hatch in three to four hours rather than 24–36 hours. There is a fine art to using bleach to weaken the shells. You don't want to add too much bleach and kill the brine shrimp eggs and your fry. Several internet sites also sell decapsulated brine shrimp eggs. Although these decapsulated eggs do not hatch out live brine shrimp, the fry will eat these. And, on the internet you can find many videos on how to hatch brine shrimp normally. Brine shrimp typically hatch in about 36 hours.

Egg yolk infusion. This really is a last-resort food. This may foul your water. Actually, this WILL foul your water. Feed about one-tenth as much as you think you should! Boil an egg. Then, take three-to-four grains (smallest particles) of the egg yolk and feed that to your fry. Put the three to four grains in a cup of aquarium water. Shake it and stir it until the yolk is totally dissolved. Then add a little bit of this water as a test feeding. You can store the shaken yolk water for a later feeding. Expect to make 50 percent water changes for the next three days after this using egg yolk.

Liquid fry food. This is another "last-resort" food. You can usually buy this food at pet stores. My fish usually do not want to eat this liquid fry food, but I think it makes the infusoria in the tank grow, and the fish feed on this infusoria bloom. Feed sparingly. At the most, one drop per quart of water. Be ready to make water changes the next three days if the water gets cloudy.

Adding snails. I don't like to add snails until the fry are three to four days old. But if you add snails, they will eat up the left-over food and the snail droppings will encourage the growth of infusoria. If you are desperate for food, you can crunch up a snail and fish will eat the soft parts of the snail.

Local fish clubs. Hopefully you have networked with local NANFA/AKA members. We have them in almost every state! Those NANFA/AKA members and members of your local fish club might be able to provide you with some live food to get you through those first crucial days of your baby killies.

These stop-gap measures should give you enough time to order some live food such as microworms and brine shrimp. I suggest that you always keep at least one live food item on hand to use for your fish or to have available to share with others!

Figure 6. Brine Shrimp hatcheries.