

THE NATIVES ARE MAKING ME RESTLESS

by Bob McDonnell

The Following article is adapted from one written by the author, a NANFA member, for Michiana Tropical Times, published by the Michiana Aquarium Society, Osceola, Indiana. It is presented here as an example of the type of article which aquarium-society members should consider writing for their society publications. Just remember to mention NANFA, with information on how to join.

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I've evolved from being a tropical-fish hobbyist into something of a native-fish freak. I don't think it's because every item or article I read about a North American species bemoans the fact that we aquarists are notorious for ignoring "our own" fishes. Nor have I stumbled onto a single source of easy access to American species. No, it just happened! I'm glad it did--the natives I'm keeping are among the prettiest and most interesting fish I've ever had. My wife's probably glad too--when the utility bills come. Most natives don't require any heaters; some would actually be harmed by temperatures over the 68-72 degrees that our basement family/fish (or is that fish/family?)room averages during the year. Cooler water is not, in the handling of many natives, the option it can be with, say, African killies. Whereas the metabolic and growth rates of the latter group of fishes can be manipulated through temperature adjustment, an entirely different aspect of piscine physiology dictates natives' compatibility with their environment: oxygen levels. Many American species require high concentrations of oxygen in order to function. Cold water's capacity for the retention of dissolved oxygen is much greater than that of the identical liquid at a higher temperature. While a given coldwater species may survive in a warm tank--if provided with sufficient aeration--the combined oxygen yield of a room-temperature tank and some added turbulence will more than double its chances of attaining natural appearance and behavior.

My expanding affection towards natives started modestly enough, with Jordanella floridae, the American Flagfish, which most of us have seen in aquarium shops from time to time. I leapfrogged directly to the comparatively rare Adinia xenica, the Diamond Killifish. My struggles with Elassoma evergladei, the Everglades Pygmy Sunfish) have gone on for years, but only recently have I begun to maintain them successfully and enjoyably. Since then, too, a colony of Heterandria formosa has been gathered, and Gambusia affinis were kept long enough to gather some points in an aquarium-society breeding competition. There was certainly no systematic pattern or plan involved in my accumulation of natives.