

SALT PONDS OF KEY WEST, FLORIDA
by Andrew Borgia, Key West, Fla.

Living in the southernmost city in the United States, Key West, I have little or no access to freshwater collecting sites. I have, however, found some extensive salt ponds behind the Key West International Airport.

The area is bordered by Red Mangrove trees and has a mud and shell bottom. When you arrive at the salt ponds, the first things you'll notice are the large schools of Sailfin Mollies (Poecilia latipinna). Females are numerous and males rare. They range in size from ½-inch fry in the weeds along the edges to 3½-inch adults. They are easy to dip-net in large quantities. Along with the mollies are Sheepshead Minnows (Cyprinodon variegatus) and a few Gulf Killifish (Fundulus grandis).

In some areas of the ponds, there are patches of weeds on the bottom, and these yield Rainwater Killifish (Lucania parva). The males are very pretty, with bright red fins. Gulf Toadfish can also be found in the weeds and under rocks.

A little deeper, in about three feet of water, are schools of Hardhead Silversides and Barracuda (S. barracuda), and the ever-present Gray Snapper (Lutianus griseus).

A few minutes up the road from this site, a section of the marsh is piped through Venetian Rd., forming a pool approximately twenty feet across. All the above-mentioned species are present, but along the rock wall are colonies of Crested Gobies. They are one of the most beautiful fishes found at the salt ponds. They are gray overall, marbled with black, and have an orange spot on the dorsal and a fleshy crest on the head. They are easily netted and do well in tanks.

I've noticed that it's best to collect four to six at once and place them in an empty tank. They soon settle down and establish their own territories and their own pecking order. If one or two are collected first and then others added later, the originals will kill the newcomers.

Also found at this site are Mangrove Gambusia (Gambusia rhizophorae). They look like G. affinis, but have no dark bar at the eye. They have black spots along the back, and orange dorsal fins. They school at the surface.

On the side of this pool are small puddles, three to four feet across and about six inches deep. These harbor G. rhizophorae, P. latipinna, C. variegatus, F. grandis, and the Diamond Killifish (Adinia xenica).

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We don't have the lakes and streams of other more northerly NANFA members, but the salt ponds provide an excellent source of aquarium material.

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