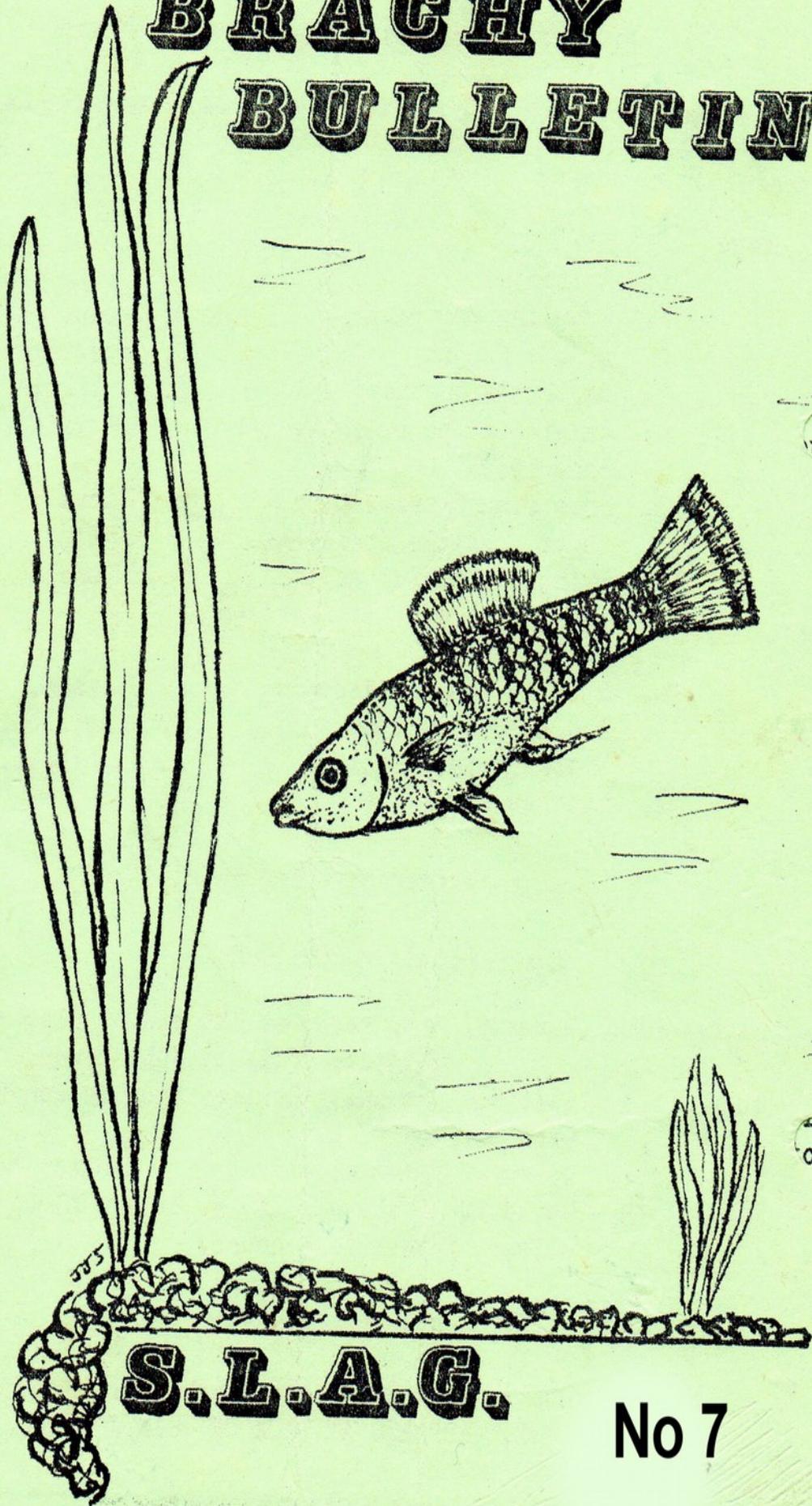


BRACHY BULLETIN



S.L.A.G.

No 7

SOUTHERN LIVEBEARERS AQUATIC GROUP

QUARTERLY JOURNAL No 7 JULY 1980

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URGENT

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All copy for the Journal to Joe Sutcliffe (20)

URGENT

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**S.L.A.G. ACCEPTS NO RESPONSIBILITY FOR VIEWS OR OPINIONS
EXPRESSED BY AUTHORS IN THEIR RESPECTIVE ARTICLES IN THIS JOURNAL**

EDITORIAL

I am still not getting enough support from members with regard to articles etc. for the Journal. I know its the old old story and you've heard it all before but, believe you me its so very true.

The Journal takes well over forty hours to type and edit and a full day (usually my day off work) to print and collate. Add to this three or four Sundays attending Committee meetings at just over 300 miles per round trip (at my own expense) and you will begin to see why I think I am wasting my time doing this job. Especially when only a handful of members (mostly Committee members at that) are prepared to spend an hour or so to provide me with material to work with. Maybe my time would be better spent in the fish shed or garden. I have asked before and I will ask again, but, I will not ask many more times. Let's have something from YOU for the Journal, even if it's only a letter saying "You volunteered so what are you moaning for?" So I did volunteer, and I will do the job willingly and even give up moaning if you will give me a little help.

I know those of you who know Jim Carney will have been surprised to hear of his unfortunate accident and I know all the S.L.A.G. Members will join me in wishing Jim a speedy and full recovery. For the benefit of our Northern members Jim is an F.B.A.S. Judge well known and respected in the South of England.

Ivan tells me he has 25 confirmed bookings for the German trip which makes the effort he has put in well worth while.

Joe Sutcliffe

FROM THE CHAIRMAN

I have got myself rather involved in putting on some sort of stand at various Open Shows this year. At Croydon A.S. ON 22/3/80 we managed to decorate a table and great interest was shown – one or two possible new members approached us but the main interest was in the very small number of species I had managed to find the time and room to bring with me, having to catch my entries for the Show. At Medway A.S. On 18/3/80 S.L.A.G. Member 49 was the Show-secretary and I found a couple of days before hand that I was to be the one doing our stand! Again we had to use a trestle table on which we put our polystyrene boxes covered with material destined to become some lady's skirt in the future. (My wife Audrey is a dressmaker, luckily.). I had obtained some large polystyrene initials to put on the wall. Again great interest was shown but the stand of the stand to date is poor quality. I would like to thank those members who, on the spur of the moment helped at both these meetings. Member 85 and I are, I hope making a better attempt at the Mid-Sussex Inter club on the 1st June.

What I think we need if we are to continue putting on such stands are member/s in the various areas who are prepared to undertake this work. I cannot find the time to do this on a continuous basis although I will always be prepared to bring fishes for the stand, if I am going to that particular show. Any member willing to offer their services for this publicity and information service please write to our Secretary Ray.

Species Control mentioned Index cards records in Journal No 5. I keep such a record.....

with one card for each species and bloodline. The S.L.A.G. Refs. Are recorded on each together with DEC for “declared”. I also have my own one on number refs. With a,b,c, etc. for bloodlines. At present this totals 65 cards. Notes are made of all transfers in and out and details sent to Species Control about every three months. Notes re breeding are also made, the main thing with such a record is that you must make notes immediately transfers, etc., happen. I am a great note maker at “the time it happens” and these can be entered up later. I am not, of course, breeding 65 species at any one time but I do try to make sure that I have sufficient of each to enable my stocks to be continued; obviously the more species you keep the less you can breed to provide supplies for others. It is a question of keeping them going and trying to breed more of the rarer species than the common ones so that other members can have some and, I hope maintain them. The more common species I breed periodically so that I do not lose them.

Dave Cheswright Chairman

-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-

THIS SPACE IS RESERVED FOR AN ARTICLR FROM

“YOU”

The Care & Breeding of Poecilia vivipara

Thanks to the generosity of Ivan Dibble in April 1979, I acquired seven fry of the *Poecilia vivipara* from Dr Bodarts Brazilian collection. As they were still very young I housed them on their own in a 10" x 8" x 8" newly set up tank with a small addition of (block) salt, at a temperature ODF approx` 75°F. The growth was quite rapid on a diet of micro worm, brine shrimp, sifted daphnia and fine flake food plus green food. The rime eventually arrived when when I thought they would benefit from having larger quarters and they were moved to a 24" x 12" x 12" tank again newly set up under similar conditions. However, after a few days the fish appeared to be unhappy, and did not eat as heartily. A close inspection for disease proved negative and temperature checks seemed stable at 75°F. My feelings of apprehension did not go unfounded, for three days later four of the vivipara developed the dreaded shimmies, and none of the fish took any interest in food. Obviously time to take action and the following decision was carried out. After calculating the water capacity, a third was syphoned off and replaced with fresh tap water to which had been added two heaped teaspoonfulls of (block) salt. 24 hours later one fish had died and there was no sign of improvement with the remaining, in fact they were all shimmying now with clamped fins. Feeling somewhat dejected at the thought of loosing this attractive livebearer I raised the temperature to 80°F and added one drop of "Diseasolve" per gallon for good measure! The following morning I peered anxiously into the tank fearing the worst but, Hey Presto !! without a doubt, there was a slight improvement,.....

I tried to get some live ½food into them as by now they were very thin and weak but unfortunately it was rejected shortly after being taken into the mouth. Once again I raised the temperature to approximately 85°F and from then on the fish started to recover to full health. Despite my elation at having pulled them round I could not but notice that the vivipara were not happy or at ease in this larger tank in spite of it being fairly heavily planted. Apart from darting out to snatch food they would invariably be huddled together in one corner cowering and quivering like frightened rabbits. Two months passed, by which time the young were young adults in good health and good condition but nevertheless still very nervous and I concluded that under the present set up they were unlikely to breed. Reluctantly I decided to move them to another smaller tank 14" x 10" x 10" again newly set up in the following manner. Medium size gravel 1½ inch deep, fresh tap water with two heaped tea spoons of cooking salt (block) per gallon, filtration by sponge Poly filter, a separate air stone set at a fast rate and the temperature set at 80 to 85°F. The tank was literately stuffed with aquatic plants/weed and lit by an ordinary 60 watt tungsten light bulb. This arrangement was left for approximately two weeks before the fish were introduced by which time the tank had a coating of algae. Upon moving the fish I observed there were four males about 1 5/8" long and two females perhaps a little larger. It was quite amazing to see how well they took to this environment, eating with great enthusiasm. Conditioning them for breeding consisted of a diet of a range of live foods with particular emphasis on small chopped earth worms.....

which were greedily taken. Fertilisation (or at least the act) was witnessed and subsequently one of the females showed signs of being heavily gravid. I decided that owing to the density of plant life not to risk moving the female for fear of premature birth. Well everything went O.K. And sure enough one morning fry were evident in the tank. After watching the adults vain (but to no avail) attempts to consume the offspring, I again decided to leave them in situ. The adult fish were fed as heavily as possible on micro worm, brine shrimp and dried fry food etc added for the young. Obviously some of the fry must have been devoured by the adults but nevertheless a total of 21 offspring were removed in the presence of Don Kenwood who was visiting me at the time. 17 of the fry were passed back to Ivan. In conclusion I would stress that the information, which proved successful for the writer, should only be taken as a general guide and may well alter according to water conditions in other areas of the country, as far as the temperature and salt concentrations are concerned. For those who are interested the tap water at Merthyr Tydfil is very soft/acid with a pH reading of 6.8.

Paul Burton

A YEAR WITH MR & MRS BOGEYES

I was fortunate during the early part of 1979, in being able to purchase two juveniles of *Anabeps anabeps* ? Approximately 1 to 1½ “ long. During the past year, they have grown to about 6”, and I am pleased to say, have sexed out as a pair.

They started their life with me in individual 18” tanks, as one was being bullied and looked thin. Each small tank had a raised bed of gravel at one end, to enable the fish to “waddle up the beach”.

After a couple of months, the skinny one was now much stronger and I decided to re-introduce them into a deep sided 245” tank with a gravel bank. This was in natural lighting, and within a very short time, it became impossible to keep the tank free of algae. It covered the gravel and the glass, which blocked the filter. The problem was that the fish loved the sunlight in the tank to bask in, and I didn` t really have to give this aspect up. So I had a 6ft x 12” x 12” tank made. This I half filled with water leaving the bottom almost completely clear, box filters now took over from the U/G , and as sun bathing platform I used a large flower pot topped with a flat slate. This protruded just above the water level. I have now used this tank for about six months, and have found it very successful, but during this time I have never noticed any signs of amorous intention from the male.

A couple of weeks ago I decided I would give their tank a spring clean, to make way for all that lovely sunshine to get in. I removed some of the original water into a 2 foot tank, and after some frantic net work I managed to move them both over.

Within ten minutes, the male was like a thing possessed and appeared to remember everything that mother nature had taught him. Why they had never shown any interest in the larger tank beats me, perhaps he likes his women in confined spaces!

Now I shall have to wait and see if they.....

are compatible. As this is a species like *J. lineata*, requiring the proper combination to achieve fertilisation.

TO SUMMERISE

I have had no real difficulty in maintaining this species, other than at the initial stage, where the weaker one was segregated. Any food is greedily taken, with maybe the exception of fish? I tried them with some *P vittata* fry, and the majority are still surviving very nicely in brackish water. Set up the marine solution with an hydrometer.

A cover glass is a must, these fish can move very fast indeed, and should be in the Olympics when it comes to jumping, which they do to catch a nice big blue bottle. By the way, they always seem to attack a fly from behind, bite off the body and leave the head and wings.

Well that completes my first year with Mr & Mrs Bogeyes, (my wife gave them that name).

Will 1980 produce the blinking of tiny Bogeyes? All we can do is cross our eyes and hope.

Colin Howe

Poecilia parae – EIGENMANN 1894

Quite recently Ivan Dibble received, through his contact in the “American Livebearer Association” fish which were named as *Poecilia melanzona*. Unfortunately not all survived.....

but he was able to preserve some of the specimens in formalin. These were subsequently passed to Manfred Meyer for his comments on the identification.

With the permission of both Manfred and Ivan, the following is an extract of the comments made by Manfred on the back of photograph of the gonopodium of one of the male specimens.

All the fishes have the same morphological signs – *Poecilia parae* Eigenmann, see (Henn: “South American Poeciliid Fishes – page 133) . Hennis *Poecilia melanzona* type.

After the last revision done by Rosen & Bailey in 1963 we have *Poecilia parae* – page 56.

Poecilia parae has certainly had a complicated history as the following synonyms will indicate:-

- Poecilia vivipara* - Eigenmann 1894
- Poecilia parae* – Regan 1913
- Micropoecilia parae* – Hubbs 1926
- Acanthopoecilus bifurca* -Eigenmann 1909
- Micropoecilia bifurca* - Hubbs 1926
- Poecilia melanzona* - Henn 1916
- Micropoecilia melanzona* – Hubbs 1926
- Lebistes reticulatus* (misidentification) Regan 1913

Throughout all this three types had predominated, i.e. *parae*, *bifurca* and *melanzona* all having been given specific status until Rosen & Bailey published their findings in 1963. They have in fact the breeding and maintenance of living specimens in the laboratory have produced answers which other systematise had.....

been unable to assess. Adult males & females were collected from the vicinity of George Town British Guiana, from which were bred some 64 young, (maximum brood size 10 - average 4 or 5). The adults reared from these offspring produced all three of the above types with a very high proportion without any markings otherwise than the "shoulder spot". Only a single female of the original collection bore young of all three basic types. Most broods consisted of unmarked fish with one or two of the melanzona type. They were able to establish that these three polymorphs do not differ in morphological traits or diagonal characters, hence their assessment that all three are the same species and the name *Poecilia parae* was maintained for all three by virtue of its /chronological priority.

Much of the confusion previously was caused no doubt by this variation.

It remains to be seen whether the live specimens which Ivan still has and which although very "guppy like" in appearance seem to be showing very aggressive behaviour, will produce the results obtained by Rosen & Bailey in their breeding programme. Certainly it will be a long process building up stocks, since the present female appears gravid but fails to produce young, and also all indications are that broods are going to be very small in any case.

The second illustration shows a line drawing from Hennis 1916 paper published in the Annals of the Carnegie Museum of the distal end of the gonopodium of the species related by him as *P. melanzona*. This was from the type specimen (number 1068) lodged at the.....

Carnegie Museum and show obvious similarity to the photograph produced by Manfred Meyer from the specimen submitted by Ivan Dibble. Rosen and Bailey of course placed *P. melanzina* in synonymy with *P. parae* -Eigenmann 1894 hence Manfred identification.

There are two points to consider from the papers published by Henn in 1916 and Rsen and Bailey in 1963. The first being the problems which have arisen over mis-identification due to the male of one species being taken in association with the female of another.

Henn points out that “Eigenmann based his species on a male, as the type with which were associated 7 females which seemed to belong to a distinct species, subsequently described by Regan as *P. picta*. The apparent differences between the single male and the females was supposed to be those of sexual dimorphism”. He also points out “Regan contained material contained males agreeing in colouration with these females, to which they unquestionably belong, showing their specific from *P. melanzona*. Regan’s supposition that the type of *A. melanzinus* is the male of *Lebistes reticulatus* erroneously.

There are many other such identifications which lead only to confusion to the modern systemats especially when dealing with newly collected material from the more remote or even widely distributed species.

The second important point to pick up is the way in which Rosen and Bailey were able to define the species of *P. parae* by maintaining and breeding specimens from a single collection, showing how important it is for us to maintain every separate collection of any species in isolation so that our.....

Scientific friends will be able to call upon future generations for their studies. This is a course of action which I amongst a few others have been advocating for years now and which SLAG are now backing with the Species Control system being evolved.

There are two other species in the *Micropoecilia* group – *P. picta* & *P. banneri*. There are indications that these may be one and the same species giving priority to the name *P. banneri*, although Rosen and Bailey in 1963 were confident that there was sufficient anatomic difference in the gonopodium to keep them separate. I have some literature on the description of both of these species, but I feel sure that I have seen more recent information in my travels through the paperwork at the University. Before summarizing what I have I will attempt to trace the rest and give an up to date look at the situation.

I am hoping that this will be the first of many summaries of literature which becomes available. It takes time to put together information such as this together which is why the SLAG committee have asked me to devote my time to this side of the hobby. The more information we can assemble will of course be to our advantage so if anyone has any copies of any papers which may be of interest, please send them on. The result after years of work will, I hope, be a comprehensive library for our members to refer to.

Don Kenwood, Technical Editor

SWORTAILS FROM VERACRUZ & THE ORIGIN OF MY SPOTTED STRAIN

In or about 1959 Dr Myron Gordon in his booklet "Swordtails as Pets" T.F.H. Publications, described how he found a rare black spotted variety in several wild populations of Mexican *Xiphophorus helleri*. He commented that this trait was something of a mystery, as it was restricted to only one percent of the wild population: yet in the aquarium it was inherited as a single dominant Mendelian gene, the influence of course being that it would tend to spread widely through the stock. This information was remembered by me until some thirteen years later and I had the opportunity to visit Mexico myself.

I was in Mexico shortly before Christmas 1972, with Chris Lyon (then of Southend A.S.) and my father. We had driven eastwards from the central plateau, down past the rain shrouded volcanic peaks in the vicinity of the mighty Mount Orizaba, through the city of Jalapa (famous for its coffee as well as its University) and reached our first fish filled river, at a place called Puente Nacional, near Rinconda. Here a tremendous torrent of water tumbled down the Jalap Mountains towards the Gulf of Mexico, and here we found our first real Mexican Swordtails. There were other fish too in abundance, including Gambusias, Mollisias (*Poecilia*), *Heterandria bimaculata*, *Astynax* (tetras), and Cichlids. As dusk was rapidly approaching (this happens at about 6 pm in Mexico in December), we captured just a few young specimens and headed for ther tropical Gulf Coast city of Veracruz, some 39 miles further to the South-East. We.....

found accommodation in a poor and noisy Motel at the back of town, but it was cheap.

Veracruz was worth a day or two's visit in its own right, so after 2 or 3 days successful exploring the states of Veracruz and Tabasco further to the East, we the city to find a friendlier and slightly better Hotel (about half a star!!!), nicely located across the road from the beach on the Villa del Mar. This was Christmas Eve, and I have vivid memories of the fire crackers (sold on every street corner) exploding all over the city that evening. Next morning, Christmas, we awoke to torrential rain showers drifting in from the Gulf; but the weather quickly cleared and it was possible to sun bathe in stifling heat on the beach all morning. This made me restless, and with four or five hours of daylight left (never mind Christmas dinner!!!), we took the car and explored inland, taking two or three local roads. In particular, we fished the Rio Jamapla at Soledad de Doblado, and in the Rio Moreno (?) (or Rio Otapa) at the spot where it flowed under highway Mex, 145, south of La Tinaja. There remains some doubt about the names of some of these rivers, as the ordinary tourist road map does not always agree with local signs!!! I am even now attempting better maps from Erich Hnilicka. Although we failed to find the Rio Jamapa strain of *X. maculatus* that day, we took a good number of other fishes, and returned to Veracruz that evening, tired but with a collection including Gambusias, "Pseudos" (*H. bimaculata*), *X. helleri*, and mollies. Of course, I already had a few *X. helleri* captured just a few days earlier at Puente Nacional, not to mention numerous fishes captured in other areas already described.....

In our gloomy Hotel room that evening, after the usual water changing routine, I was inspecting the latest acquisitions and realised to my delight that one young swordtail (about one inch long) was developing the black spotted pattern (it does not show fully until maturity). This fish was to survive all the rigours of the trip back to England, and it eventually developed into a fine male.

We had caught all these *X. helleri* in the vicinity of Veracruz and it was convenient even, perhaps essential, to transport them all together, although a pity we had to do so. So they were mixed up at first, but have been maintained as a “pure” strain (if that’s the right description) ever since. I think that it is unlikely that my present aquarium stocks owe any ancestry to the Puente Nacional fishes which were actually kept on their own, and which breed readily enough in captivity, but this was in pre- SLAG days and the strain was eventually lost. On subsequent visits to Puente Nacional, I have failed to find any *X. helleri*, but this does not necessarily mean that they are not there, it may be just due to seasonal variations in water flow, perhaps, not to mention the very restricted time for fish collecting. In 1979, I had just 15 minutes there!!! So, the present aquarium stock (as regards the “Veracruz” collection) is very probably a Rio Jamalpa and Rio Otapa fishes – the exact parentage will never be known now -and there may be a contribution from other locations in the area. Therefore these fishes are not much use for scientific purposes, but having admitted that, they have much to commend them.

As already mentioned, there was just one.....

black spotted fish amongst this group, and to perpetuate this pattern it was necessary to mate it to a plain wild coloured (green) female from the same stock. At the same time, green (unspotted) fish were mated together, so that two strains evolved, spotted and unspotted. The initial result of the spotted and unspotted was roughly in accordance with expectations. About 50% of the offspring coming through with the n, and the other 50% plain green. Since that time, I have generally mated two spotted fishes together, but they continue to throw a percentage of plain green fry, which, until now I have discarded.

There are other variable factors in these helleri, such as colour of the males sword: this can be anything from green through yellow to orange. Also, occasionally some males some males sport a “bright” dorsal fin with more red than usual.

These fish grew quite large at first, and I had a couple of good show males for several months, one gaining “Best in Show”, though I imagine that some F.B.A.S. Judges must have had some choice comments to make on being confronted by my non-standard monster (spotted). Obviously, after four or five generations in 18” and 24” tanks with probably an inadequate diet, there has been some loss in size but I believe the genetic potential for three to four inch males is still there and only needs some hard work by an enthusiast with the right facilities to restore proper size. Actually this is a good strain for the show bench since the tail spikes are long and straight and give the impression of a bigger male than is the case! As with most Xiphophorus, in nearly every brood there is always a percentage.....

of males which sex out early and these while they may be the most vigorous breeders well always stay small. Conversely there may also be a small number of late developing males- these will become the big fish.

This brings us to the obvious question -do we need new blood in the strain? In my opinion we should wait a little longer yet, perhaps two or three years even: that's not many generations. We have the "new blood" in our tanks already, because the spotted fish can simply be crossed back to the plain green from which they came some six years ago. And the unspotted green swords, so far unwanted, which are the by-product of the spotted strain , I am now collecting, and they can be crossed with the existing green (plain) fish and hopefully some improvement might result. This would without bringing new blood from a completely different river system.

J.H.Preston

METHODS OF MAINTAINING & BREEDING LIVEBEARERS PART TWO

I have now moved everything to the new set up. The old fish shed is in a bit of a state and we are trying to decide whether to demolish it or whether it is worth re-roofing as a household rubbish store.

My breeze block garage has not had a car in it for years, and last October I decided it would be better as a fish house; notice house instead of shed! , this being a better standard of building. One wall is the wall of the bungalow and it has wooden doors. These were sealed inside and out with mastic and screws, to render them immovable. A new.....

door was cut in the back and made out of 25 mm timber, lined inside with polystyrene and exterior ply. Half the asbestos roof was replaced with corrugated PVC and sealed. 50 x 50 mm timbers were put on the three outside walls and these insulated with 50 mm sheets of polystyrene; twice this thickness was put on the other half of the roof. The whole was then covered in treated hardboard and painted and all the joints sealed. The sealing around the floor is so good that any water spilt has to be mopped up. The whole job took until Easter 1980, and the first tank was moved in on the 7th of April. Paraffin was used as heating until 27th April when the electric heating was changed over. Paraffin was then used in the old shed until the final tank was moved on the 11th May. To the end of May it was apparent that heating costs will be about half that of the old shed about 2 pounds 50 per week. I will continue my records on this with my check meter and report on the heating costs later.

The great improvement on the old shed, apart from the additional space, is the putting in of mains cold water and the installation of drainage to the main bathroom drain; this has already saved hours of work in carrying water, there being a storage tank which is continually topped up. I have always regarded water changing as a job of work and estimate that many of us spend more time doing this than in keeping and studying our fishes. At present I have an old Elsan toilet from caravanning days in use as a chair and try to sit down daily and have a good look round after feeding times.(this is used only as a chair). This will go when I find an old chair that is suitable. I still have more lights to put up and have only run the air lines.....

half way round to date.

A few tanks leaked on being moved and a few old fishes died. *Priapella compressa* were terrified for about 3 weeks and hid in the corners of the various tanks they were in. This seems to show them as the most nervous species I have. A few *Limnurgus innominatus* died about a month of being moved for no apparent reason, apart from the fact deaths of this species are not uncommon.

I now have sufficient shelving to ensure that no small tanks are on top of larger ones. Natural lighting is good as proved by the rapid plant growth so far. I have now started my fish again. Again the nervous *Priapella compressa* have dropped only 7 or 8 fry instead of the usual 12 to 15. I had three *Phallocerus caudomaculatus reticulatus auratus* from member number 4. These turned out to be females and one died. Only one of the other two shows the gold, but this colour covers about 50% of the body, the rest being black. I crossed both to a *P. caudo`ret`* male showing a slight gold colouration. These matings produced 2 broods which I am keeping separate. It is too early to tell if gold will appear on the fry, but the gold female is truly a magnificent coloured fish. The basic *P. caudomaculatus* is known as the "one spot livebearer". The fry of this and the two other (sub-species?) are n with one spot in the centre of the body. This spot remains only in *P. caudomaculatus* (which we do not have in the UK). It disappears on the other two and is replaced by the all over black or gold colouration. I have had more than one member query the fry born to *P. caudo`ret`* when they see this one spot.

The *Xiphophorus montezumae* (a pair brought back by member 21 from Mexico 1979.....

are proving very prolific and I have a good stock of these now). The female drops about 30 plus fry which is a very large number for this species in my experience. The pair have many black markings on their bodies and the larger fry are showing these to some extent.

My method of obtaining fry is to remove females which are early pregnant to a small tank, filled with any sort of plant and/or nylon mops. These females are checked daily and part of the water is changed 2 or 3 times a week. This is where most of my water changing takes place, on a regular basis. Special treatment of the females, I feel, is the answer to the breeding the more difficult species. The same water changing takes place with the fry if they are in a small tank for a time. The tap water in my area is about pH 7.0 (neutral) and about 120 ppm, quite soft. From my past experience with Characins etc. this water seems ideal for a variety of families of fish.

I have found that *Poecilia vivipara*, stocks of which appear to be very low at present, have settled in very well and I hope to start obtaining fry again soon. How many of our members still have this species?

Dave Cheswright

CORRECTION

In a recent letter sent to members some incorrect information was given under:-

CONFIRMATION OF DATES

It should read:-

14th September Newbury, Sandleford Social Club.
Speaker Mr J. Chambers. British Museum

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