



# Currents

RETHINKING  
**DISCUS**

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MEET YOUR  
2011-12  
**EXECUTIVE  
COMMITTEE**

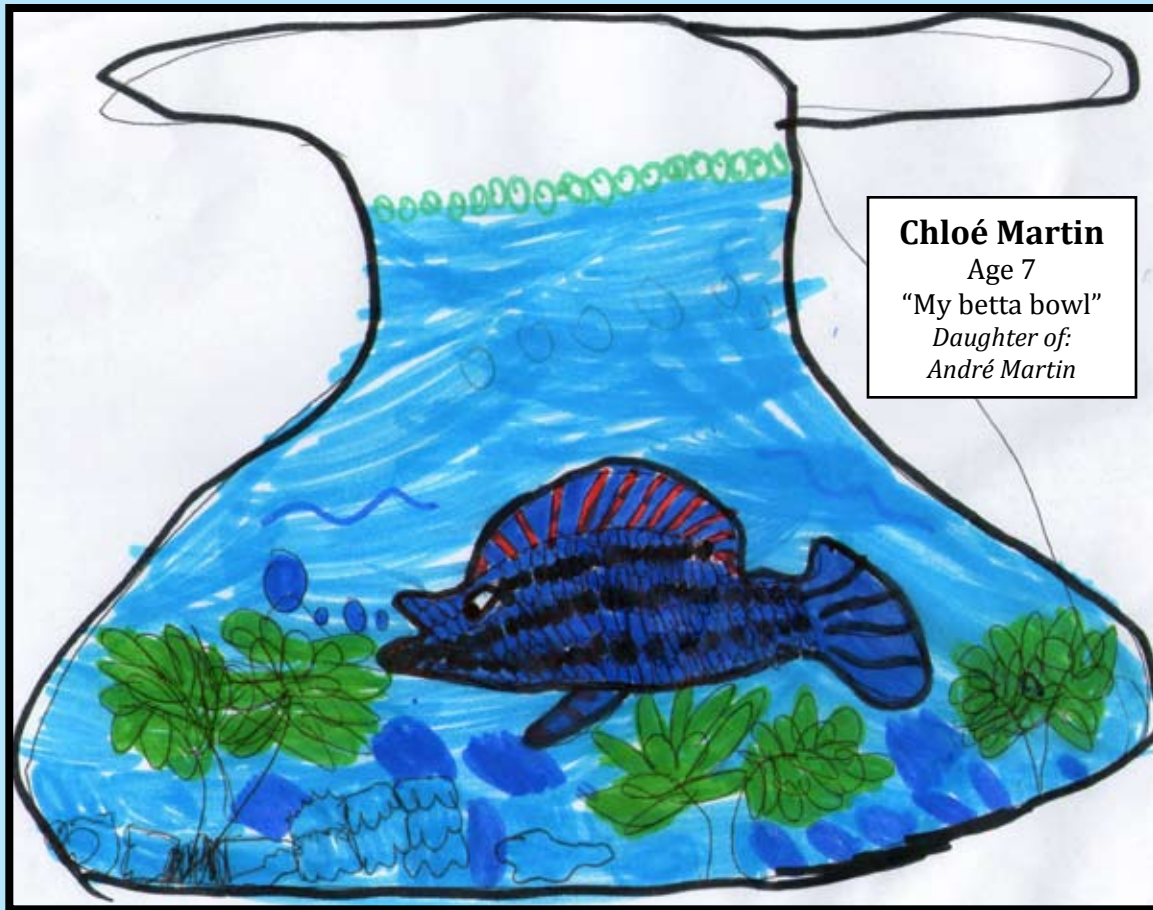
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HIGHLIGHTS  
**CAOAC**  
2011 CONVENTION

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GETTING TO KNOW  
**FISH TAIL  
AQUARIUMS**

# Show us your colours!



We're calling on all children from 1 to 12 to send us a drawing of an aquatic environment - whether it is their representation of a tank or fish they have at home or an imagined one.

We'll do a random draw of the entries with each issue of the newsletter this year.

The draw winner will get a \$15 gift certificate from the sponsor of their choice! The winning entry will be published in our newsletter as well as a number of "honourable mentions" (as many as we can fit!)

To send us your entries:

- Scan and email to [newsletter@ovas.ca](mailto:newsletter@ovas.ca)
- Bring them in person at one of our meetings

## Rules:

- open to children related to OVAS members (children, grand-children, nieces, nephews, etc.)
- one entry per child
- state child's name and age, a brief description or title of the drawing, their relationship to you, and your name on the back of the drawing
- format no larger than 8.5 x 11
- drawing must be of an aquarium or aquatic environment
- contest ends April 30, 2012

# THE FIRST SPLASH



**W**elcome to the first edition of OVAS Currents! Since taking over the reigns as Newsletter Chair, I eagerly researched various aquarium club publications from our CAOAC affiliates and industry magazines to get ideas for articles and general layout. But I also reflected on the importance and relevance of having a club newsletter, given today's world of instantaneous information via the internet and mobile devices. Indeed, our OVAS website and online forums are great resources for our members.

So why a newsletter? From my perspective, it's similar to the co-existence of magazines and newspapers, whether they are online or in print. We can think of our forums and website as the news of the day. But, like a magazine, our newsletter is meant to provide some depth and perspective. It allows our members to share their passion, their experiences, and their knowledge on a larger "canvas" than a forum post. In doing so, we also hope it will highlight the personalities, the faces, the people behind the community we call OVAS.

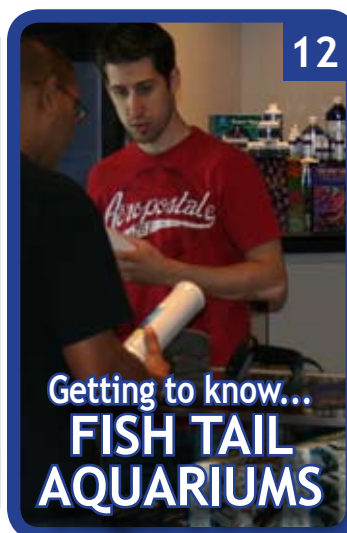
A newsletter is also about the packaging of information. I've always enjoyed the visual qualities of a magazine, and I hope this newsletter's new look – and new name

– is appealing to you. Through newsletter exchanges with other CAOAC clubs, OVAS Currents will also help promote our club and provide more visibility and familiarity with our views, activities and members, which in turn may help create new networks and opportunities for the future.

I look forward to your feedback, and also invite you to contribute to our club newsletter. Together, we can make OVAS Currents an enjoyable, informative, and credible reading experience.

André Martin (ajm1961)  
Newsletter Chair  
[newsletter@ovas.ca](mailto:newsletter@ovas.ca)

## IN THIS ISSUE...



# CLUB NEWS

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### **October 24 OVAS Meeting - 7:00 PM - J.A Dulude Arena, 941 Clyde Avenue, Ottawa**

Scheduled Speaker: Barry McKee

Barry will be speaking about his experience as a participant of a fish collecting trip in Uruguay. He will have a slide show of the trip, and may even bring a few fish he has bred from his wild caught specimens.

### **October 22 or 29 - OVAS "Field Trip" to the Canadian Museum of Nature**

RSVP by October 1<sup>st</sup> to Alysa (Nerine) email: [public-relations@ovas.ca](mailto:public-relations@ovas.ca)

FREE for members! Non-members: \$6 Adult/Senior; \$4 Student/Child (4-12 yrs); Free child (0-3 yrs) Dates pending participation. More details available on the OVAS forum.

Participants needed for "show and tell" at upcoming meetings. Presentations to last 5 minutes. Contact Sylvia (Fishnut) for more information or to confirm participation. email: [program-director@ovas.ca](mailto:program-director@ovas.ca)

## LIBRARY ADDITIONS

The OVAS library carries a wide variety of books on many subjects. There are books on specific fishes, aquarium plants, saltwater, cichlids plus many more topics. The library is accessible to all members of OVAS. A \$5 deposit is required to loan a book which can be kept for a month.

A selection of books is brought to each of the monthly meetings where they can be taken out. Books can also be requested from the library through the site found under Quick Link on the left hand side of the forum page. The book you request will be brought to the monthly meeting. Also arrangements can be made to pick up books at other times than just meetings. You can request the librarian to find a book for you on specific topics.

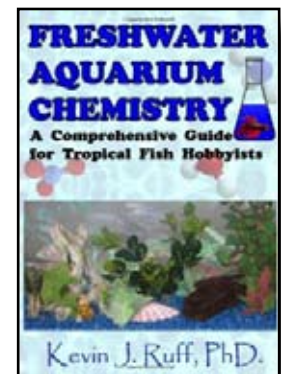
Two new books that have been acquired over the summer are:

#### **Freshwater Aquarium Chemistry by Dr Kevin J Ruff**

The book deals with freshwater aquarium chemistry such as nitrogen cycles (ammonia, nitrite and nitrate) and explains water conditions. Information is given so you can monitor water conditions so you will know when there are problems and what one can do to fix the problem. Both novice and expert aquarists will find in-depth information on how to keep aquarium water conditions optimal.

#### **Nature Aquarium World by Takashi Amano**

Takashi Amano is world renowned for his mastery of imitating nature in aquariums. The book is beautiful illustrated. There are numerous pictures of different aquariums with instructions on how to duplicate these artistic set ups.



# MEET YOUR 2011-12



## EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE



### **Rob Thompson, President**

- **Online name:** robt18
- **With OVAS since:** December 2008
- **Hobbyist:** 14 years
- **Upkeeps:** 8 tanks
- **Started because:** A combination of

my dad's 55 gallon tank, and fishing/snorkeling at the cottage. • **Most fond of:** My oldest fish, an L200 Emerald Pleco • **Dream of having:** Potamotrygon Heleri; Helen's freshwater stingray • **Most jealous of:** Errol (Charlie)'s planted tanks are as pristine and well tweaked as they get. • **Enjoys most about OVAS:** The ability to continue contributing to the fish keeping hobby locally and sharing experiences with others to advance my own knowledge.



### **Joe Schwartz, Vice-President**

- **With OVAS since:** 2005
- **Hobbyist:** 50+ years
- **Upkeeps:** 7 tanks (65-180 gallons)
- **Started because:** A friend of my father's, an aquarist, took me on a tour of homes

with luscious tanks. I bought a whole tank of fish for \$1.50! He also introduced me to the Toronto Aquarium Society • **Most fond of:** All my tanks: One naturally planted with mostly south American tetras, a discus tank, two Neolamprologus brichardi tanks and my cold water tank. • **Dream of having:** Nothing in particular - I love nature as a whole. • **Most jealous of:** Sylvia has some Zoogoneticus tequila livebearers I'd like to get. **Enjoys most about OVAS:** Sharing ideas with other members.



### **Anton Maslov, Treasurer**

- **Online name:** zima
- **With OVAS since:** February 2007
- **Hobbyist:** 4 yrs
- **Upkeeps:** 2 tanks (75g planted, 5g planted with shrimps)

• **Started because:** Bought a used 20g at a garage sale. I was doing my Masters and didn't have time to put water in it. So I filled it with books and articles. When I graduated, I looked at the tank and thought that it might use some water now that the books are gone. • **Most fond of:** Plants, plants, plants!!! The fish are there for decoration, background, and to produce CO2 for my plants. **Dream of having:** More plants that I haven't tried growing yet. • **Most jealous of:** Errol's (charlie), Ken (jetstream), Robert (fischcopp) • **Enjoys most about OVAS:** The meetings, putting faces to online tags, talking to fellow hobbyists. Love the giant auction and the annual gatherings (Christmas party, BBQ, etc).



### **Peter Garneau, Webmaster and (Acting) Secretary**

- **Online name:** garnpet
- **With OVAS since:** April 2005
- **Hobbyist:** On and off for over 30 years
- **Upkeeps:** 2 tanks (150G and 108G)

• **Started because:** No idea! • **Most fond of:** My Yoyo Loaches • **Dream of having:** A school of red-bellied piranha (Pygocentrus nattereri) • **Most jealous of:** Errol's tanks (Charlie) • **Enjoys most about OVAS:** A source of local information



### **Alysa Farrell, Corporate & Public Relations**

- **Online name:** Nerine - it is of Greek origin meaning Sea Nymph, I love Greek Mythology!
- **With OVAS since:** September 2004
- **Upkeeps:** 5 tanks with one more on the way, and several buckets.
- **Hobbyist:** My entire life!
- **Started because:** My parents and grandparents were fish keepers and breeders. We had so many different types of fish growing up and since we lived in wonderful weather, we also kept several tanks outside all year round. Growing up, we had around 40 or more tanks going, there wasn't a bit of free counter, dresser or stand space to be found.
- **Most fond of:** My Zamora Woodcats! (Auchenipterichthys coracoideus)
- **Dream of having:** Many more of them! I would LOVE to breed these beautiful fish and am attempting it.
- **Most jealous of:** Anyone who has a tank over 200 gallons or a dedicated fish house...
- **Enjoys most about OVAS:** The knowledge, learning something new all the time, sharing experiences with others and the face time spent with the people at the meetings and events, so glad that can get together and chat! We live in a very digital age and it's nice to have a break from that and SEE and hear people talk about the aquatic hobby.



### **Jasmine Landriault, Breeders Award Program**

- **Online name:** freshfishies
- **With OVAS since:** January 2010
- **Hobbyist:** About 15 years
- **Upkeeps:** 6 tanks
- **Started because:** I fell in love with a little feeder goldfish when I was around 12 - he was just so graceful and really bright orange. I kept him in a huge tupperware container for a couple years. I think his name was Comet. Then I moved on to a betta named Captain Fantastic, and it just grew from there!
- **Most fond of:** My Peacock Cichlids (Aulonocara Hansbaenschi). They are fast, conniving, entertaining and beautiful.
- **Dream of having:** Super Red Arrowana
- **Most jealous of:** Robert Hemp's tanks - gorgeous plants, rare plecos, gigantic discus tank...what's not to love?
- **Enjoys most about OVAS:** I enjoy the community, both online and face-to-face. The information highway can't be beat and it's nice to be in the company of other 'fish geeks' and feel welcome.



### **Sylvia Robbins, Program Director**

- **Online name:** Fishnut
- **With OVAS since:** April 2007
- **Hobbyist:** 15 years
- **Upkeeps:** 10 tanks (5 to 180 gallons)
- **Started because:** My father always had a tank or two when I was a kid and it got me hooked. We also lived on a 75 acre property where I was able to catch and temporarily keep all the creatures in the ponds on the property.
- **Most fond of:** I can't choose! That's why I have so many tanks! My "Bike Creek" Gymnogeophagus are amazing creatures to watch—it's like a daily aquatic soap opera. My fancy plecos (Leopard Frog and Queen Arabesque) are so interesting and striking. The koi are amazing too with their cute personalities, amazing colours, and growth potential!
- **Dream of having:** True Altum Angelfish!! Someday, I'll have a dozen or so swimming around in my 180 gallon tank!
- **Most jealous of:** I have pond envy after visiting a koi breeder in Victoria, BC. He had built an addition to his house for an indoor koi pond—2 stories high, open concept, with beautifully positioned windows and a large Juliette balcony. The pond was about 40x20' and 10' deep with 2 amazing waterfalls. It was about 2' above ground with windows encased in the stone walls to view the koi from a side profile. From the bridge over the pond, we could watch dozens of stunning 3'-4' koi swim around. THAT made me jealous!
- **Enjoys most about OVAS:** The friendship and information exchange between members at the meetings and events. I also love the fact that there is always someone breeding or growing something interesting and that I have the opportunity to buy these amazing plants and aquatic creatures from them.



### **Shawn Do, Membership**

- **Online name:** Shawn84
- **With OVAS since:** February 2011
- **Hobbyist:** 6 years
- **Upkeeps:** 8 tanks
- **Started because:** Combination of uncle's and brother's pond and tank
- **Most fond of:** My Albino Clown Knife and Motoro String Ray
- **Dream of having:** Potamotrygon Leopoldi and Super Red Asian Arowanna
- **Most jealous of:** Robert's (fischkopp) 180G display planted tank. Just stunning to looking at.
- **Enjoys most about OVAS:** The endless knowledge available.



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## MEET YOUR 2011-12 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (continued)



### Joyce Landry, Librarian

- **Online name:** Washefuzzy
- **With OVAS since:** March 2007
- **Hobbyist:** Off and on for many years. Didn't know what I was doing until I joined OVAS.

• **Upkeeps:** 2 tanks (27gal, 2.5gal) and a bowl (10gal)  
• **Started because:** My Dad had 7 aquariums when I was a kid. • **Most fond of:** Flying Fox and my pygmy corie. He is so small and cute. • **Dream of having:** Clown Loaches • **Most jealous of:** Anyone who has a 100gal aquarium. • **Enjoys most about OVAS:** Companionship and information.



### Wayne Smith, Social Convenor

- **Online name:** WandMangels
- **With OVAS since:** February 2008
- **Hobbyist:** 4 years • **Upkeeps:** 4 tanks
- **Started because:** Had aquariums when I was younger.

• **Most fond of:** Red turquoise Discus  
• **Dream of having:** MORE discus  
• **Most jealous of:** Evelyn Turner's tanks (2075turner)  
• **Enjoys most about OVAS:** Meeting and talking to people in the hobby.



### Randy Moar, Auctions

- **Online name:** White Lightning
- **With OVAS since:** September 2006
- **Hobbyist:** 7 years
- **Upkeeps:** 7 tanks and 5 bowls
- **Started because:** I like decorating and

found that a nicely decorated fish tank could really tie together room and be a conversation piece.

• **Most fond of:** My ornate polypterus  
• **Dream of having:** Scorpionfish  
• **Most jealous of:** Focusfin and Hookup's tanks  
• **Enjoys most about OVAS:** Found there to be a lot of kind hearted people who are very helpful. I have met a lot of good people through this club.



### André Martin, Newsletter

- **Online name:** ajm1961
- **With OVAS since:** January 2009
- **Hobbyist:** On and off for 20+ years
- **Upkeeps:** 6 tanks (135g to 10g) Started because: My kids wanted goldfish. After a

few years, I lost interest until one my friends showed me his cichlid tank. I renewed my interest again recently when I was introduced to OVAS by Gerry Mann with whom I played hockey with. • **Most fond of:** Some Placidochromis phenochilus tanzania and one Sciaenochromis fryeri that I got at the Ohio Cichlid Extravaganza last year, and a pair of Pseudotropheus cyaneorhabdos from the Tropical Fish Room when I was at the CAOAC convention in Brantford. • **Dream of having:** I'd like to keep an endangered cichlid, like the Astatotilapia desfontainii. • **Most jealous of:** Takashi Amano's tanks, and anyone (like Errol) who can create such luscious underwater gardens - amazing! • **Enjoys most about OVAS:** Meeting the people, exchanging information and our mutual passion about the hobby.

## GOT A STORY TO TELL?

Deadline for the next issue:  
Friday November 11



Send to: [newsletter@ovas.ca](mailto:newsletter@ovas.ca)  
or contact Andre Martin (ajm1961)

*1000 Islands Aquaria*  
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Website: <http://www.1000islandsaquaria.com/>

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Website: <http://www.laniche.ca>



# RETHINKING DISCUS and other tropical fish...

by Joe Schwartz

Picture by Rebecca Bingeman  
(RebeccaB)

## Ecological History

Aquarists can be divided into groups based on how they name their fish. A majority of hobbyists fail to appreciate the first step in getting to understand nature is the ability to put a name to the organisms. They refer to that “little blue and red fish”. Those starting on this path of understanding will use common names like Neon or Cardinal Tetra. Advanced hobbyists utilize Linnaeus’ latinized binominal nomenclature system, generally specifying the genus and species like *Paracheirodon Innesi* and *Paracheirodon Axelrodi*. In these examples, the genus term referring to the shape of teeth and the species name honouring W.T. Innes and H. Axelrod. All the terms have changed over time. And knowing these terms does not make you a better aquarist. That skill is acquired by learning the ecological history of the organism.

## Patience and Persistence

Having bred cichlids in the past, I set a new goal to breed discus “naturally”. Without a defined goal – more than “just keeping fish” – there is no connection between the effort and the resulting reward. Accidentally breeding fish is not the same as working towards that goal.

My difficulties are no different than any other novice aquarist. Best summarized by Jacques Cousteau<sup>1</sup>:

“The wealth and variety of the sea can only be preserved if we follow the rules of biology and we must know them before we can observe them.”

The problem is we aquarists have diverse backgrounds which do not include the biological rules of the sea. Finding reliable sources of information is difficult for this reason.

Authors of books, salespeople, Google sources, and forum contributors seldom have backgrounds in physiology, nutrition, limnology, animal behaviour, pathology, or ichthyology. Among amateurs the expression “the blind leading the blind” is appropriate. If one has training in any of the above, it becomes obvious when a source has reached what I call “the limits of their ignorance”. It is hard to find a “how to” aquarium book without obvious errors in content or technical data.

The second difficulty is expressed by Dr. Reiner Klimke, the only Olympic equestrian to have won gold in two different equestrian events:

“There is nothing you can do fast with a horse, except ruin it, that you can do very fast.”

The same applies to the aquarium hobby. It is something not appreciated by those who rush to set up their first aquarium over a weekend. Working with nature always takes patience and persistence.

## Schooling Behaviour

Hence, I have proceeded slowly and critically. This is what I have learned. Discus are a schooling fish – as are most – with an alpha leader acting as a lookout and decoy for predatory fish. Various individual fish will become the alpha even in an aquarium. They are usual male as size and colour increases success and survival as a decoy.

A group of eight or more allows for functional group behaviour, like minimizing the effects of aggressive cichlid behaviour towards the smallest fish. Keeping a small group of three or four will result in an emaciated, razor back fish which eventually dies.



## Nutrition

Young discus must grow rapidly during the wet season in order to survive the starvation of the dry season. Jack Wattle<sup>2</sup> advises feeding growing discus three times a day, every day, and adults once a day skipping every tenth day.

What do discus really eat? Research on discus at Penang University<sup>3</sup> indicates the optimum protein range of 45-50%. Values below and above that range produce suboptimal growth. Azoo Discus Pellets have 49%, HBH African Cichlid 45%, and Hikari Discus Bio-Gold 50% (minimum).

Heiko Bleher<sup>4</sup> presents the following field data:

1. Blue-Brown (*Symphosyon Haraldi*) are the most omnivorous, which accounts for their wide natural distribution and domestic breeding success.
2. Heckel (*S. Heckel*) and Green Discus (*S. Aequifasciatus*) are largely herbivores or eat detritus – dead organic matter – during the dry season.

Food Source	Heckel Dry – Wet	Green Dry – Wet	Blue-Brown Dry - Wet
Flowers/Fruits	15 – 52%	18 – 62%	9 – 44%
Algae	12 – 5%	15 – 8%	25 – 12%
Aquatic inverts	10 – 3%	13 – 5%	27 – 16%
Terrestrial inverts	8 – 2%	2 – 7%	5 – 22%
Detritus	55 – 28%	52 – 8%	39 – 6%

3. All species of discus prefer to be herbivores. Thus beef heart is not appropriate. It's true that feeding meat products to cows promotes faster growth, but the prions produce B.S.E. ("Mad Cow disease"). Discus get H.L.L.E. (Head and Lateral Line Erosion) which is believed to be nutritionally induced. H. Bleher has observed all discus species eating camu-camu fruit which contains 50 times more vitamin C (plus other nutrients), on an equal mass basis, than oranges. Consider feeding berries, peas, spinach, and look for high spirulina content. Forget baby guppies, as Bleher has never found fish flesh in dissected stomachs in 15 years of research. With detritus available, my discus ignore cherry shrimp. Going on holiday? Throw in handfuls of aromatic detritus (pond source), turn off the lights and forget about your discus – they will be fine.

## Water Chemistry

All wild discus live at 28°C, give or take a few degrees depending on the depth of water. "Discus thermometers" with coloured ranges into the 30s are designed to speed up metabolism, which for ectothermic organisms (i.e.



Picture by Terry Hoare (SuperT)

that absorb energy from the environment) speeds up all reactions including death.

Discus will breed anywhere from six months to six years. The middle range is the norm, two to four years. I have a pair of discus bought as juveniles which are ten years old. The water temperature is often allowed to drop into the low 20s. They have not had ich or any other disease. High temperatures just "burn out" your fish faster.

However pH and conductivity do vary for each species. These are averages with a variance based on Bleher's 15 years of data collection:

Discus	pH	Conductivity*	Water**
Heckel	4.0 ± 0.8	4.2 ± 4 µS	Black
Green	5.4 ± 0.8	10.5 ± 5 µS	Black
Blue-Brown	6.1 ± 1.2	31.4 ± 25µS	Clear

\* Jack Wattle recommends 700-800 µS for raising juveniles to supply minerals for soft and bone tissue growth (Sept. 2008).

\*\* No discus live in Amazonian 'white' water



Picture by Normc

You can see why keeping Heckels has earned a reputation. The data indicates that keeping Heckel and Blue-Brown discus together would be as foolish as keeping Blue-Brown discus and African cichlids together based on their preferred pH ranges.

### Tank Set up

Discus bodies contain a lot of biomass (in grams) so forget the one inch per gallon guideline. It's not the length of fish but the mass of protein that metabolizes producing ammonia waste. Keep each mature discus in 20-40 gallons. Use a Blue-Green acrylic paint (clean glass with TSP solution – take care as tri sodium phosphate has a pH of 12) to cover back and sides. Painting the outside wall eliminate the optical illusion of a mirror preventing the discus from swimming into the glass when they go into “hyperdrive”. Use silica blasting sand as a substrate. Float natural driftwood placing African/Java Fern and moss on the wood. This set up with dim light (old bulbs) will provide you with good viewing and a “natural” setting for the discus.

Filtration systems can never be too large, only too powerful. Consider multiple systems. I set up each discus tank with an undergravel filter with a small powerhead, an internal canister filter, and a large air driven hydrosponge.

Discus are indigenous to slow moving tributaries, not the Amazon itself. Changing 30% of the water each time will maintain relatively low pollution levels (high nitrate levels impede growth). Less than 30% will allow pollutants to build to substantially higher levels. Greater than 30% is better but not much as the law of diminishing returns applies to water changes. Do the math to convince yourself.

### Sexual Behaviour and Dimorphism

Juveniles delivering hard body blows are males competing for alpha position. Female aggression

is characterized by head to head encounters with occasional “kissing”. Alpha fish are not challenged but are often the first to pair bond. A possible evolutionary reward for a risky job? Once bonded, the alpha position is vacated to another in the school. Each member of the pair will chase off members of the same sex, not the opposite – sound familiar? Once you have identified your first male-female pair working out the sex, the rest is fairly easy. Males will outgrow females from an early age to become larger. They also develop an elongated dorsal fin at maturity.

### Husbandry

In discus, good parenting comes with practice. Wattle recommends conditioning with small earthworms (*lumbricus* sp.). This correlates with Blehers’ data of 22% terrestrial invertebrates during the wet/breeding season. Keep water at about 25 to 26°, similar to flood water. The discus will lay eggs on vertical surfaces: slate, brick, PVC, pipe, or tree bark. These can be removed (except trees) into a 20 gallon isolation tank with a kH of less than 3° to maximize hatching. Add 2 drops of 5% aqueous methylene blue per gallon to inhibit fungus.



Picture by Terry Hoare (SuperT )



Picture by Evelyn Turner (2075turner)

Free swimming fry can be transferred into a hatchery of about 4x5x8" long with a slanted bottom to facilitate siphoning uneaten artemia and dead fry. Use an air driven sponge filter to supply a trickle of water. Allow the overflow to leave via a screen covered notch in the diagonally opposite corner from the inflow. Use the remaining air flow for a large hydrosponge. The heater goes into the 20 gallon tank where water changes can slowly increase the kH value. Use an LED light 24/7 over the tank as moonlight. When fry reach 0.8 cm, release them into the 20 gallon tank. Use flake food as dried paste on a round air stone for a tasty surrogate parent. Feed sinking pellets at four weeks. Meanwhile back at the breeding tank, the pair will hopefully have laid more eggs. To assist their learning curve:

1. Lower water level to 10 inches (25 cm)
2. Paint the outside of tank white on all four sides. This is to assist fry in locating the dark brown with black striped parents they are genetically programmed to see at birth. Not the pale blue diamond or golden discus who are their modern-day parents.
3. Remove a suspected parent who eats eggs or fry. Usually a poorly conditioned female. Recall how hungry you were during and shortly after pregnancy. In the fish world, males make good parents (for example: bettas, gouramis, pipefish, and seahorses).

4. Or try screening off eggs (only works well with PVC pipe) and add two drops 5% methylene blue per gallon. This solution will not help free swimming fry but you may be able to get the female to start eating before the fry arrive.
5. Parents that darken up with slime seem less bothered by feeding fry. Good conditioning helps to supply body reserves.
6. Most importantly, the challenge is not with the fish we keep. They just do what comes naturally.


The real challenge is overcoming our ignorance of their ecological histories. It is our responsibility as hosts (we don't really own them as they can leave us anytime they want, by dying) to learn the ecological rules of each organism who sacrifices their freedom to be confined in our aquaria. They give up much of their life to enrich ours. Learning how to provide the basic natural ecological conditions is the least we can do to maintain the wealth and variety of aquatic/marine life on our planet.

## Take care (of the Earth)

Joe Schwartz

### Sources:

1. Cousteau, Jacques-Yves, *Life and Death in a Coral Sea*, Doubleday, 1971.
2. Wattle, Jack, Ask Jack, *Tropical Fish Hobbyist Magazine*, September 2008.
3. Au, Dick, *Trophy Discus: The art of selecting, grooming, and showing discus*, Cichlid-Press, 2007.
4. Bleher, Heiko, *Bleher's Discus Volume 1*, Aquapress, 2006.



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# Getting to know...

In this series, we talk to the people behind the businesses that sponsor our club.



## Profile

Owners: Patrick Carriere, Eric Bergevin

Established: 2004

Location: 2208 St Joseph Blvd Unit 101, Orleans ON

Phone: (613) 845-0048

Website: [www.fishtail.ca](http://www.fishtail.ca)

An Ottawa-based company that offers over 10,000 products such as corals, fish, supplies, and equipment for marine aquariums. Also offers several aquarium services, such as aquarium maintenance, tank drilling, and sump building. With over 3,000 sq ft of floor space, it prides itself as the biggest saltwater specialty aquarium retail outlet in Ottawa.

## Q&A

**Q:** So, what got you into this business?

**A (Patrick):** Both Eric and I were hobbyists since we were kids back in the late 80s. I started with goldfish and later into other freshwater species - it was always an interest to me. A few years after graduating from Algonquin College in Business Administration, I wanted to have a business of my own. So, I started Fish Tail Aquariums in 2004 as an online business from my home. I knew Eric from school and he had good web and marketing skills, so I asked him to partner with me. Next thing you know, we moved the business into a store front on St-Joseph Boulevard. It was a small store in a strip mall, about 500 sq. ft. At that time, we were mostly freshwater. We grew over time and then moved again into its current location - a much larger space that allowed us to showcase more products. We then phased out the freshwater stock and focused on saltwater livestock and products.

**Q:** What do you like most about your business?

**A (Patrick):** There is always something to learn in the hobby. We educate many customers on various aspects of keeping a saltwater tank, but we learn too. And like other industries, the technology is always changing. When I was a kid, underwater gravel filters were widely used. Now, I can't give those away! Filtration and lighting are always evolving.

**A (Eric):** It's a fun and colorful hobby. As a marketer and graphic designer this makes the marketing side of the business so much fun. This is probably my favorite part of the business. I spend a lot of my time creating ads and posters for our website and other advertising media. Unfortunately, there's so much else to do that my creative side often takes a back seat. On average, I work here about 80 hours a week.



**Q:** What do you pride yourself about your store and business?

**A (Patrick):** Customer service. We want to make the hobby simple for our customers - not overload them with information. We take the time to listen to their needs. We want to make sure our clients are successful in their saltwater hobby. We're in it for the long-term.

**A (Eric):** We also have a lot of good products at competitive prices. We have a great selection of coral from Fiji, the Phillipines and Australia.

**Q:** Like many kids that accompany their parents to the store would ask: do you have any "Nemos" and "Dorries"?



**A (Eric):** ABSOLUTELY! [Laughs] Clownfish are one of our best sellers, along with a bunch of other fish from the movie, such as Blue Tangs (Dorry), Yellow Tangs (Bubbles), and Cleaner Shrimps (Jacques).

**Q:** I don't own a saltwater tank myself, so how should I approach purchasing one?

**A (Eric):** The first thing is to know what kind of fish or corals you're interested in. Then we can look at the tank size in which you need to keep them. Of course, a lot depends on your budget. Our most popular tank size is a 75 gallon. To keep costs down, you can go with a "Fish Only With Live Rock" (FOWLR) setup. In this way, the type of lighting is not as critical as with corals, and therefore less expensive. Add a skimmer, a

few circulation pumps, substrate, and you're good to go.

**Q:** Of all the years you have been in this business, what was one of the "stories" that comes to mind?

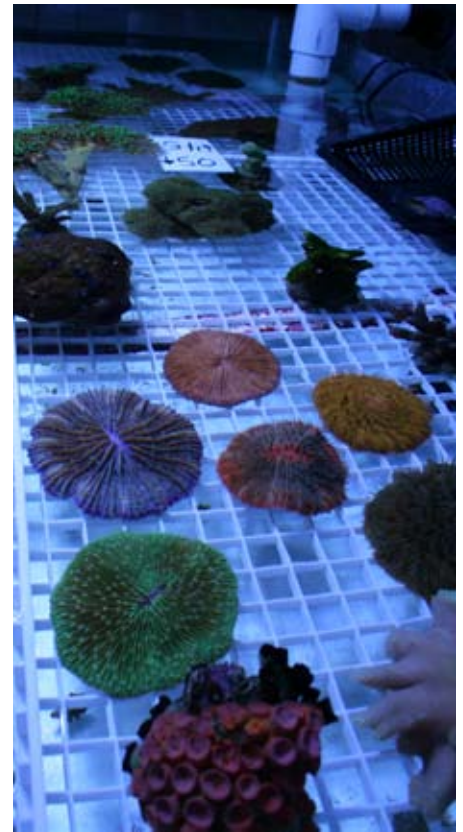
**A (Eric):** There's been a few stories. One that sticks in my mind right now is when we opened our first store. A customer, an older gentleman, was telling us that we were too young to be in business, that we should go work in the government or something. He didn't think we would make it. Well, a few years later he came to our new store and was surprised to see us, bigger and better than ever. It was a motivator for me, and I'm proud that we've made it this far.

**Q:** Any upcoming specials or news from Fish Tail Aquariums?

**A (Eric):** We will be receiving the new EcoTech LED lighting system in our store sometime in early October. This is an incredible light and our customers will be able to view its abilities in person at our store. Its specifications are available on our website.

**Q:** Any message for our membership?

**A (Eric):** We're happy to see that the saltwater hobby is alive and well at OVAS. We're glad to be a sponsor. A number of OVAS members are already customers of ours, and hope to meet more. Cheers from Fish Tail Aquariums!





Although it's been awhile since the annual CAOAC convention – May 20-23, 2011 – I'd like to share my experience with my fellow members. I am particularly compelled to do so given that I was the sole representative from OVAS to attend this year.

The 52<sup>nd</sup> Annual CAOAC Convention was hosted by the Brant Aquarium Society, at the Best Western Brant Park Inn, in Brantford, Ontario. These facilities offered a cosy atmosphere, with nice sized conference rooms that were all easily accessible on the main floor. The restaurant provided affordable family fare. On this particular weekend, the Park Inn was also host to the National Conference of the Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians. Needless to say, my wife and I had never encountered so many guide dogs in one place! So, it was all fish and dogs on that May long weekend...

On the social side, the conference had many activities: a "Poker Run" of local fish stores, a karaoke night, and a casino night. We managed to win enough play money to buy a few of the many gifts that were auctioned off at the end of the evening. We were happy to outbid everyone for "Billy the Singing Bass"! Our seven-year old daughter can't get enough of Billy's rendition of "Don't Worry Be Happy" and "Take Me to the River"! (groan)

I also had a great time singing at the karaoke night. One of the highlights of the evening was a visually impaired young man who sang a nice version of an Elvis gospel tune – he proudly proclaimed afterwards to a round of applause from the audience: "I did it without looking at the lyrics!"

Now for the fish side of things. The conference included a total of seven speaker sessions as well as one hands-on seminar on coral fragmentation. Here are some of my highlights from the sessions I attended.



### Myron Roth - Myths About Aquarium Fish Health

*Myron is currently an Industry Specialist on Aquaculture and Seafood for the Province of British Columbia. He has several years of experience in the development and application of fish medication and vaccination for commercial aquaculture. He is also an executive member of The Greater Victoria Aquaria Society.*

In his first session at the conference, Myron also covered microbiology, viruses, and bacteria as they relate to fish keeping. In this session, he spoke more specifically on the myths about the use of pharmaceuticals and other "cures" in dealing with fish diseases. For example:

#### **"Be prepared with a well-stocked medicine chest!"**

Why buy medicines in anticipation of disease? They may not be effective against the disease that may show up in your tank, and they may expire before you need them.

- **"It's critical to treat the fish as soon as possible!"**  
That may be true, but the aquarist must first make a proper diagnosis.
- **"A little salt in the tank is a good preventive measure against disease!"**  
Salt may be used to fix a short-term problem such as Ich, but it is not recommended as a long-term preventive measure. Salt changes the parameters of the water, and may stress inhabitants who are



better adapted to softer water conditions. So, in fact adding salt may indirectly cause disease.

- **“Some medicines are labelled as reef safe!”**

Be aware that these label claims are not approved by the FDA and Health Canada. Manufacturers do have to validate their claims.

In general, Myron stresses that the most important things about the use of medicine in aquaria is selecting the correct medicine according to the diagnosis, and applying the proper dosage. It was an interesting topic coming from a very qualified speaker.

One website that Myron referenced for more information on fish disease diagnosis and treatments: <http://www.nationalfishpharm.com>

## Laif Demason - African Cichlid Farming in Florida



*Laif operates Old World Exotic Fish Inc. in Homestead Florida since 1979, where he farm raises African cichlids and imports species from over 15 countries. He has been instrumental in opening up new territories for cichlid export in East Africa. He also writes a regular column entitled “What’s New Around the World?” for Cichlid News.*

Prior to his session, I had the privilege of speaking to Laif. I asked him about the fish that bears his name “Pseudotropheus Demasoni”. First, he mentioned that many people pronounce it “Dema-Sony” when in fact it should be “Duh-Mason-Eye”. He didn’t discover the fish himself, but rather sponsored the divers who did back in 1993. They named the fish in his honour. This fish is



Picture by Adam\_Ottawa

actually smaller in the wild than normally seen in the aquaria. In fact, he mentioned that this fish was hard to collect because they would escape through the aeration holes in the fish barrels. He described the habitat where this species is found: in lake or river deltas in very muddy water. He also mentioned that this species was hard to sell at first, given the price for its size. In the mid-nineties, it normally sold for about \$15 each.

In the session, Laif provided details of his fish farm operation in South-Florida, as well as its numerous challenges. Homestead is located south of Miami, north of the Keys. It is situated on an ancient coral reef – and thus, the excavated ponds maintain a pH level of about 8.3, excellent for most African cichlids.



Pictures by Richard Tirzo Martin



In total, the two sites on the farm hold 650 vats, and 84 ponds.

He has five large pumps that circulate several hundred gallons of water per minute on a 24/7 basis. He farms many species – some of those he mentioned: *Scienochromis Fryeri* – which is hard to find in the wild, typically found in turbid seasonal waters; *P. Demasoni*; *Labeotropheus fulleborni*; and various species from Lake Victoria and Madagascar. Laif also described the feeding routines and the type of mixture they would use for nutrition and growth.

Sound fun so far? Ever dream of such an operation? Well take these challenges into consideration:

- **Predators:** Laif had to install vast nets over his ponds and vats, as herons would poach his stock relentlessly.

- **Toads:** Cane toads, native to South and Central America, became an invasive species in South Florida. The problem? The toads lay several thousand eggs in the ponds. The eggs have a neurotoxin that is fatal to cichlids. So, staff must do “rounds of toad kills” over the five-acre farm. A time-consuming and costly effort.
- **Hurricanes, floods, and frost:** In January 2011, the cold weather claimed 75% of his stock – roughly 500,000 fish. Hurricanes Irene and Katrina flooded his farm, either mixing all the stock or losing them outright. The worst was Hurricane Andrew. This ripped through his main facility and tore the roof off. It took 5 weeks to restore power, three months for telephone service, one year for cable television. It also left 30 years worth of trash in its wake! As he described this particular natural disaster and the devastation it caused on his farm, I could sense the emotion in Laif’s voice.
- **Competition:** Finally Laif talked about the increasing competition from fisheries in the Far East, and how it is becoming increasingly difficult for the business to be profitable in the U.S.

I thoroughly enjoyed Laif’s presentation - very insightful, informative, and even emotional. The trip was worthwhile just to meet and talk to him in person. In my opinion he is on the “A-List” of “cichlid celebrities”!

The convention also featured several beautiful fish species in their show. The “Best of Show” award was won by Jeff Mountjoy, for his beautiful and large “Red Devil” (*Amphilophus labiatus*).

There was also several beautiful male and female bettas – more species than I had ever seen before! It was a bonus brought on by the presence of several members of Betta Breeders Canada, including speaker Ann-Marie Towell.

And, the most surprising display at the show... was in the Novelty Class!

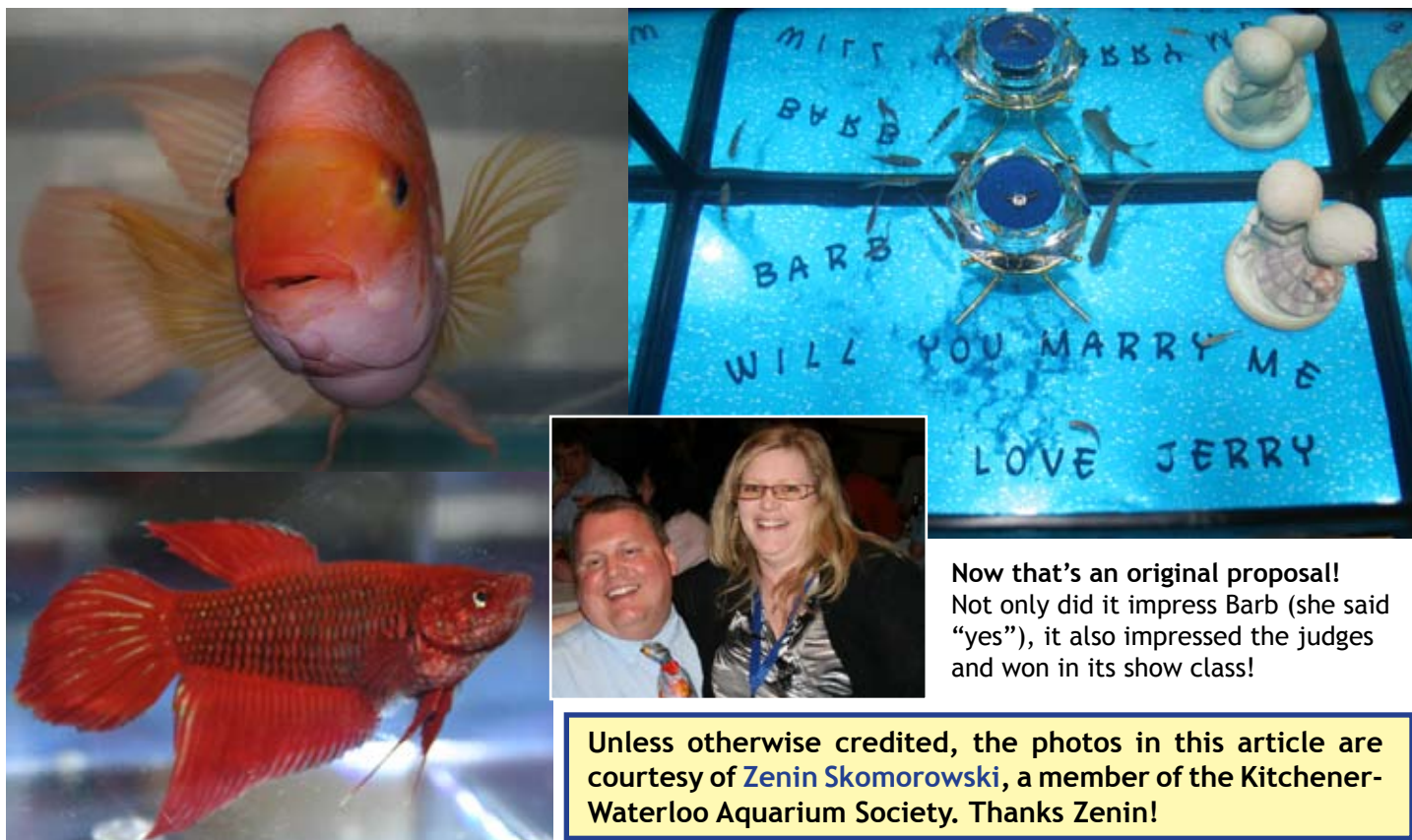
Jerry Draper, owner of the Tropical Fish Store in Brantford, and sponsor of the 2011 CAOAC Convention, proposed to his sweetheart, Barb Ireland, President of the Brant Aquarium Club, through a unique aquarium – see for yourself!

All in all, my wife and I enjoyed the convention. Many thanks to our hosts, the Brant Aquarium Club.

The next CAOAC Convention will be hosted by the Aquarium Society of Winnipeg on the Easter long weekend, April 2012.

More photos of the convention are available from this page on the CAOAC website:


<http://www.caoac.ca/photos.html>



Now that’s an original proposal! Not only did it impress Barb (she said “yes”), it also impressed the judges and won in its show class!

Unless otherwise credited, the photos in this article are courtesy of Zenin Skomorowski, a member of the Kitchener-Waterloo Aquarium Society. Thanks Zenin!





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That's it for  
this issue folks!  
See you in  
November!

