

My Favourite Season

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Fall is my favourite season. The kids go back to school. I get to work outside tidying up the gardens, planting flower bulbs, raking leaves, and enjoying the occasional bicycle ride. Of course the most fun I had this fall was attending several aquarium club auctions and shows.

I started at the London Show and Auction on Sunday September 28th. This was the first time I had shown entries outside of our monthly club show jars. In the past we had a couple of speakers at our monthly club meetings as well as senior club members talking about conditioning and showing fish. I tried to take all their suggestions into account when selecting which of my fish to show and how to present them.

Since I had just started keeping cichlids last year, and I was having fun watching and breeding them, they were a natural first choice for me. I picked my alpha male Yellow Labidochromis caeruleus because he was looking great and full of himself keeping the other seven yellow labs in their place in the pecking order. The other cichlid I picked was my male *Iodotropheus sprengerae* (Rusty Cichlid). He looked great as well. His brown body has contrasting yellow accents on his dorsal and ventral fins, as well as bright yellow-orange egg spots on his anal fin. When he is showing off to the two females, he has a purple sheen to his body.

I had to get up before 6am to take all the 15 or so rocks out of the aquarium in order to catch my show entries. I have a couple of two gallon aquariums to show the cichlids. Since my show fish are each about 4 inches, I would have felt very bad trying to show them in anything smaller. I transported each fish in its own three gallon pail with a snap lid. The pails made it very easy to carry the fish from house to car and then to the show table. After registering my entries for the show, I filled each aquarium about half way. I chose not to use the supplied air because the small aquariums have a large surface area, but I did use a glass lid with a vent corner cut to keep in some warmth. I put the Yellow Lab in the aquarium with the blue background. This combination reminded me of a prairie scene with yellow wheat and a big blue sky. For the Rusty Cichlid, I used a black background. I thought because of his brown body, he might be difficult to see. I considered switching the tanks. However, the black background really highlighted the yellow fin accents and egg spots, so I left it as is.

At about this time, I saw Dean Crawford and his daughter Erica, also from my home club, setting up their show entries. We were not in direct competition with each other because they brought bettas, loaches, swords, and their shark-like catfish. They also set up a novelty tank with a road track, race cars and giant danios. Of course, the danios were just too fast to see the numbers on their sides – Ha !

Just before judging time, I noticed that some classes did not have any entries, and other classes had one or two fish entered. Both of my cichlids were in the Old World Cichlids class, but there were plenty entries in this class. There was a beautiful *Sciaenochromis fryeri* (Electric Blue) that I was sure was going to win the class. Oh well, off to the auction and wait for the judging results later.

I had placed two bags of Rusty Cichlid fry in the auction. I attached photos of what they should look like as adults. I should have noted on the bags that the father is in the show, oh well, next time.

There were about a hundred people bidding on the auction items. There were a few friends from my club, so I tried not to bid against them, but oops, sometimes it happened. Later, someone mentioned to me that at auctions, there are no friends – Ha ! Besides, if you scout out the tables before hand, you will see that usually there will be more of what ever it is you want on a later table. You just have to be patient to wait for it.

At this particular auction, the buyer pays for the item in cash as it is received from the runner. I guess this makes the end of the day quicker at check out time, you only have to be paid if you sold anything.

During the auction I bid on plants only. My Severum's usually treat any plants as a salad, especially Amazon swords and Bacopia. For a change, I purchased some Spiral vals, Anubias, and Java fern.

Part way through the auction, the results of the show judging were announced. Dean and Erica won a pile of awards. In the "Old World Cichlid" class, I placed first with my Rusty Cichlid. Wow! The judges must have felt he was in excellent condition and showing front of the tank behaviour. My Yellow Lab did not place, and I guessed why. He was not very happy. His face was quite black and he was trying to hide in the back corner. I took another look at the Electric Blue. I noticed that there were several splits on his dorsal fin. I assumed that is why he did not place. It was still a nice looking fish and maybe I will have them in one of my aquariums some day.

As I was packing up my fish and accessories, it occurred to me that I should have a check list of items to bring with me:

- Show tanks and lids
- Show jars (when I bring smaller fish)
- Net
- Siphon
- Cloth and old towel for wiping hands, glass, and the show table
- Tape (in case a background needs reattaching)
- Scissors (if I did not bring them, I would wish that I did)
- Peel and stick labels
- Pen
- Spelling of the Latin name and the common name of the fish
- And of course, the fish in a large pail of conditioned water

If I forget anything, I am sure someone else would help me out, just as I would help them.

After I got home, I noticed that the beta Yellow Lab took advantage of the missing alpha. I watched for about an hour as he merrily asserted himself over the remaining Yellow Labs. When I returned the alpha to the mix, there was lots of gill flaring, open mouth boasting and chasing in circles. Eventually they locked jaws and I was quickly trying to locate a net just in case I needed to separate them. After a few minutes, the beta swam off to a corner and the alpha was back in charge. There were no injuries, but the beta sulked in the corner for a day before resuming his second place standing in the pecking order.

The following Sunday morning October 5th, I was off to Hamilton for their auction. There was no show, but there still was plenty to see on the auction tables. Once again I was buying just plants and selling a couple of bags of Rusty Cichlid fry. In the auction, a bag of ceramic tile media for a canister filter came up, so I bought it for \$5, a very good deal. Then a pair of South American *Geophagus iporangensis* came up. How did I miss them when I was checking the tables? These fish would be perfect companions for the Severum's in my large planted aquarium. I had to have them. I do not even remember how much I paid for them, emotion just took over. I guess that happens once in a while at auctions.

Towards the end of the day there were not very many bidders. Many people had already checked out to avoid the long line up. Bags of fish were going for a dollar or two. I purchased a bag of four Daffodil Brichardi and another bag of three Julidochromis Regani for a dollar each. A great deal, two dollars for seven fish. Since I already had a Tanganyikan tank set up with only one pair of Brichardi, these two bags of fish would go in there nicely. I had to buy a styro box to take home all the plants and fish I bought. So much for not wanting to buy any fish!

Three weeks later on Saturday October 25th, my home club, The Kitchener-Waterloo Aquarium Society held their annual Oktoberfish auction. It had been over 10 years since the club had a show. Al Ridley, our Oktoberfish chairman, insisted that everyone in the club enter at least one fish. He was expecting around 40 entries total. I decided to enter another one of my Yellow Labidochromis caeruleus and a male Aequidens rivulatus (Green Terror). Turns out that there were lots of entries from neighbouring clubs. All 23 classes were represented in the 144 entries. My fish were in the "Cichlid over 4 inches Total Length" category. This class had lots of entries. As before, my Yellow Lab hid in the corner and went quite black in the face. He did not place. I think I will give up on the Yellow Labs and try something else in the next show. My Green Terror had good colours, but he was too young and too small to be in the top three of a class. I hope that he will grow to six inches or larger by next year's show. The winners that I remember were Jerry Draper from Brantford and Mike and Dorothy Daniels from St. Catharines. There were other winners from Hamilton, Brampton, Durham, London as well as Kitchener-Waterloo and other clubs. I hope the results will be posted on our web site soon. I think people were happy with their very nice award plaques.

Meanwhile, the auction went on with about 120 bidders through the day. I was a runner as well as a bidder, sometimes at the same time. I purchased a bag of Krill Plankton flake to give my fish more variety. Back at the Hamilton auction, I had purchased an Anubias Barteri. My Severum's kept pulling it out of the flower pot, so in this auction I bought a nice looking potato-sized rock for a dollar to try and hold the plant in the pot. A short time later, a beautiful four inch albino Bristlenose pleco came up with a minimum bid of \$20. He had a wonderful face full of bristles and had a nice golden yellow colour. There were no bidders right away. I thought about it for a few seconds while delivering a previous purchase to a bidder, and then I put up my hand and said "I will take him for \$20". No one else bid, so he was mine. All right!

Later, I purchased an Amazon sword for my Severum's to munch on. Also, a couple of Geophagus iporangensis came up, but were sold before I could bid on them. I was busy running purchase info to the computer at the back of the room. Another bag of Geophagus iporangensis came up on the next table. This time I was able to bid and purchase them. They are smaller (younger?) than the other two I bought in Hamilton, so I hoped that they would all get along. This variety of Geophagus has green eyes, iridescent blue spots on the face, and a red lace pattern on the fins. The grey-brown body has a black spot in the middle; the rest is covered in pearl-like scales. There is a black vertical stripe below and slightly behind the eye. At the end of a very long day, I was very happy to see that these fish look great in my planted tank as a contrast to the green or slate blue of my Severum's.

The next Show and Auction was in Brampton on Sunday November 9th. It was another early start as I decided not to show cichlids this time. I looked at my shoal of 8 Tiger barbs and picked one that had a nice golden orange colour, well defined black vertical bars, and very red ventral fins. The other Tigers were larger but had some black splotches. Another entry was a Giant Danio that I had not been able to catch for over a year, but this morning, I got him! He looked great with his silver and blue body colouring and some tinges of red in his fins. My last entry was a Gold Gourami. I picked the smaller of the two I had because his colour was better and he had a nice white accent fringe on his anal fin. I decided to use show jars instead of two gallon tanks, because these entries were smaller than the cichlids I had at the other shows.

I picked up Dean Crawford, our club president, and we were on our way to Brampton for a day of showing and bidding. In the auction, I purchased some earthworm flake. I do not even want to think of how this stuff is made – yuck! One of the plants I purchased is a Ruben Sword. It has long one inch wide leaves with red highlights. I will have to place it close to the lights in my planted tank to try to keep the red showing. I purchased two heaters and a box of rocks for the second hand 50 gallon tank that I bought last week. I bid on some Gold Spot plecos and an Albino Bristlenose pleco but I did not get any fish this time around.

The show judging results were announced part way through the day. My Giant Danio placed third in the "Rasboras, Danios and Minnows" class. Dean brought a "six pack" of Bettas to show, but none placed in the top three. Perhaps there should be a "Peoples Choice" award that show attendees vote on. Many people commented that they would have voted for one of Dean's Bettas for sure. Oh well, there is always next year.

After I got home, and as I was returning my show fish to their homes, I was thinking of why I like to go to the shows and auctions:

It is a good chance to meet and chat with other tropical fish enthusiasts that I might not otherwise meet

It is an opportunity to support other clubs in their efforts

There are always fish, plants and accessories that I usually do not see at the local aquarium stores

I always learn something about the hobby and the people who support it

Like most things, the more you put into your hobby, the more you get out of it

If you have any thoughts or questions regarding what I have written, please send an email to me zenin@golden.net or come out to the monthly club meeting and we can chat.