

My First Year in the KWAS

by Zenin Skomorowski

It has been about a year since I joined the Kitchener-Waterloo Aquarium Society. I was introduced to the hobby over 30 years ago by my grade 7 science teacher. He took me to Bridgeport Aquarium, which turned out to be Bob and Dorothy Daniells' basement. Over the years, I have kept mostly tetras, barbs, sword tails and platys, along with kuhli loaches and plecostomus. I never had cichlids, but I thought they might be an interesting choice after some research at local fish stores and on the internet. I happened to be at a newly opened tropical fish store when I overheard Bob Brown talking to the owner about the local Aquarium Society. I found the internet site, sent in my application, and attended my first meeting in January 2002.

I liked the format of the meetings with the question and answer period along with the "Name That Fish", raffles and mini auction. The casual seating around tables allowed me to meet other club members quite easily. I could also browse the library.

At January's meeting, Al Ridley presented a slide show on preparing driftwood. It was obvious that the slides and the text were not Al's because they did not always link together, but Al soldiered on, and with helpful comments from other club members, he made an entertaining presentation. I enjoyed it very much. Thank you Al!

A week later, I set up a 30 gallon aquarium with lots of rocks and caves. It was twice the size of any of my previous setups. I cycled it for a couple of weeks while I went looking for African Mbuna cichlids. My research showed that most Mbuna are quite aggressive, however, I selected a pair of moderately passive Rusty Cichlids (*Iodotropheus sprengerae*) and six juvenile Electric Yellow Labs (*Labidochromis caeruleus*). The Rustys are mostly brown with yellow highlights on the dorsal, anal and caudal fins. The male has a purple body sheen when showing off to the female. As the name suggests, the Labs are bright yellow. There is also a black stripe running the length of the dorsal fin. The females seem to have more white highlights and vertical stripes. They all immediately claimed various caves and rock crevices. My African tank is 16 inches high, but it might as well have been 6, since these Mbuna rarely venture far from the substrate, even at feeding time. Over the next few months, the female Rusty did hold fry in her mouth, but only one has survived to juvenile size. Several of the Yellow Labs have also been holding, but none of the fry have survived. Perhaps I will set up another 15 gallon nursery tank for expectant mothers in order to have greater success at raising some fry.

For the March meeting, the club went to the University of Guelph for a tour of the Hagen AquaLab building. This facility was recently expanded and has lots of fancy equipment for controlled experimentation and lab testing. Unfortunately, due to light restrictions, we could not observe many of the experimental setups. Perhaps we can come back on a Saturday or Sunday in the daytime to see more. I did peek in some of the large fiberglass vats of trout. It was sort of spooky to see so many fish in such a small space, but the water flow through the tank keeps them fresh and growing.

At the April meeting, the guest speakers gave a fine presentation on outdoor ponds and waterfalls. My wife Janet has suggested we have a pond, but that will have to wait until next year at the earliest. I will also have to think of how I can keep out the neighborhood cats!

An older brother of mine lives in Brantford and has aquariums as well, so we decided to attend the Brant Aquarium Society Auction on April 7th. I really enjoyed looking at the wide variety of fish, plants and equipment. I picked up some good deals on Java Ferns and Amazon Sword plants. I will try them in my African tank, because it makes me nervous to have an aquarium with no plants. More on this later. Kent Hunter-Duvar was there selling some Saulosi. It was nice to see another KWAS member there.

In the May club auction, I purchased an albino bristle-nosed pleco to join the Tiger Barbs and Gold Gourami in my 15 gallon tank. This dwarf pleco is doing a great job of keeping the glass clean of algae, despite staying only 1.5 inches long. A great buy if you can find one.

In the September club auction, I purchased a pair of Ulrey's Tetra to join the Brilliant Rasboras and Corys in my son's 15 gallon tank. When checking on the requirements for these tetras on the internet, I noticed that the photos did not match the ones I brought home. Further searching suggested that they are Diamond Tetras. Whatever the name, they get along very well with the Rasboras. I also won a pair of Dalmatian Mollies in the October Name That Fish. They joined the Rasbora tank and are happily munching on the algae.

At the October meeting, Charlie Drew from the Hamilton club gave a great presentation on spawning egg scatterers. Now I know why my tetras, danios and barbs never produced any fry. Maybe I will try the proper setup after my cichlids have been spawning for a while and I am looking for something different to try.

Oktoberfish was a blast! I volunteered to be a runner and had a great time. I also had an opportunity to purchase more plants. It was at about this time that my brother decided to downsize and keep only his one salt water tank. He had already returned his fish to a local store and asked if I wanted his 100 gallon fresh water setup. It took only half a second for me to say yes, but then I thought my wife might have something to say about it. Fortunately, she said it was ok, and I was off to Brantford to pick it up the next week.

Do you know how much an empty 100 gallon aquarium weighs? What ever it is, it seemed twice as much since my brother and I had to carry it up from his basement! I was really glad that it was going to be on the main floor at my house! However, the best place for it was right where my 30 gallon was sitting. So, after draining, moving and resetting the 30 gallon in the other corner of the room, I began to fill the 100. It took a lot of trips with a 2 gallon bucket to fill it up! Since I decided to try new world cichlids, I knew it had to be softer water with a lower pH than the tap water that I put in the African tank. The easiest way would be to have lots of plants, so I moved all the plants from the African tank. They were not doing so well in the hard alkaline water, so I was hoping for an improvement in their growth and colour. I also put in the Vallinseria and Java Ferns that I purchased at Oktoberfish. After 2 weeks, the new 100 gallon setup was looking great, so now for some fish. I had to purchase a larger net in order to move a common pleco that was outgrowing the 30 gallon. Back in the February KWAS newsletter, there was an article on the under rated and under appreciated Severum (Heros Severus). I did some additional research on the internet to see photos, and then went looking for them locally. I purchased 4 juvenile slate blue Severum's as well as a 6 inch green Severum that had outgrown someone else's tank and had been returned to a local fish store. I also purchased some Giant Danios to give some action in the top portion of the tank. Things were looking good. It was not to last, however. The large Severum decided that all those plants would make a great salad, and proceeded to mow them down! Even the apparently bitter tasting Java Ferns! Well, now I clip a leaf of Romaine lettuce just below the water line to distract the Severum enough to try and give the plants a chance to grow back. I am still hoping. By the way, my daughter has named him Roi, which makes him the king of the tank in French.

For the December meeting, it was a finger food pot luck extravaganza that I really enjoyed. I did not win any of the raffle prizes, but came close on the gold nugget pleco. The guest speaker was Dr. Glenn Marshall from the Canadian Rift Lake Cichlid Association in Guelph. He gave a speech and an awesome slide presentation of one of their collecting trips to Lake Malawi. I was glad to see that my African tank was closer to the natural setting with lots of rock and no plants.

Meanwhile, for my South American tank, I purchased a pair of Geophagus Jurupari, sometimes known as earth eaters or the horse face cichlid. Some notes on the internet suggest that a name change to Satanoperca or Satan's Perch is in the works. Despite their ferocious looks, they are docile and are quite content to roll grains of the substrate in their mouths looking for scraps that the Severum's drop. Unfortunately the female died within days. So I took her back and got another, but she also died within days. When I went back the second time, the fish room attendant mentioned that all the other geophagus in that shipment had died, probably from some internal parasite. He gave me some medication to put in my tank to make sure that my remaining male

survives. It has, so far. Since there were no more geophagus, I was given a pair of Green Terrors (*Aequidens rivulatus*). They have green markings on their face similar to the Geophagus, but are more oval like the Severum's. When the Green Terrors get older, they become quite aggressive, but right now they are the smallest fish in the tank, so I hope they will behave for a while.

Well, I hope you enjoyed reviewing some of the KWAS events and my own experiences from the past year. Now, tell me about yours.