

Avoid Being A Nervous Fishkeeper

Submitted by Phil Maznyk, Kwas (pmaznyk@rogers.com). Photos by the author except as noted.

Fishkeeping is supposed to be relaxing and fun. Is it not? Often it is, however just as often, it is not. Here are some reasons that fall into the latter category. Dead and dying fish, algae everywhere in the tank, heater and filter problems and fish that hide all the time. Is it any wonder that new hobbyists have high anxiety? What will go wrong next? Why did I get into this hobby in the first place? Those are two of the most common questions that beginner aquarists find themselves asking when things start to go wrong!

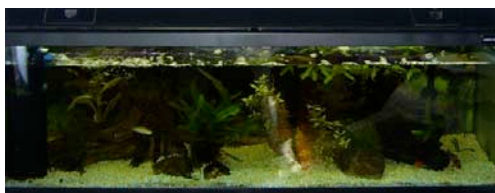
When it comes to aquariums, prevention is everything. Curing a diseased fish is unfortunately, often as likely to fail, as it is to succeed. Continually removing algae will become a nuisance chore very quickly and never seeing those nice fish you purchased can make us all wonder why we have an aquarium in the first place. It is logical to assume that the solutions to all of these challenges could well be found in the initial approach taken.



Scrubbing problem algae.

Having too many fish in the tank, feeding them too much, too often and not maintaining good water quality are all going to result in sick fish that can quickly become dead fish! It is not a question of 'if' but 'when' will this happen. You cannot maintain good water quality if the organic load in the aquarium is too high. This is true regardless of the size of tank and even the type of filtration you choose. Wishing it

were not so, will not correct it! Research your fish, based on your particular tank's size and filtration, you can make an educated guess on an appropriate amount of fish.



Poorly maintained tank.

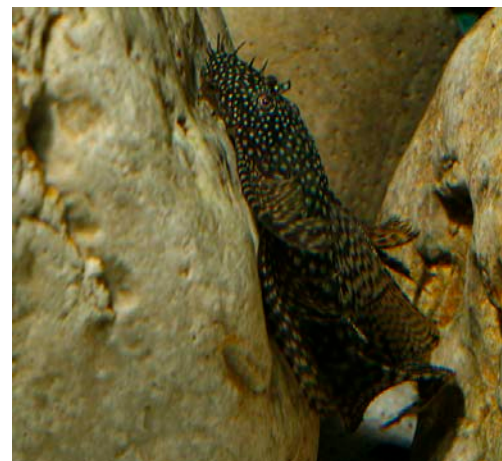
The combination of excessive organic compounds in the water, warm water conditions and excessive light will all lead to algae problems. If there is lot of light, particularly direct sunlight, you can have an abundance of green algae in your tank faster than you could imagine. If there is less light, you could even end up with an excess amount of brown algae. While not as difficult to clean as the green form, it can still become an unpleasant sight. From a biological point of view, algae are simple single celled organisms that are a naturally occurring component of all aquatic environments, both in aquariums and outdoors in nature. Aquarists however, have the power to control the intensity and duration of lighting that reaches our tank. You could even fill the tank with live plants. They will naturally absorb excess nutrients that opportunistic algae are using to prosper.



Too many nutrients, too much light.
Photo from marchak.ca

Fish will hide for many reasons. Some species however, are nocturnal. They come out mainly after you have turned

the lights off. This behavioral pattern is a direct result of their natural evolution. It is the way nature made them! Daytime predatory fish are unable to efficiently hunt in a dark aquarium. Many species of fish, especially catfish, have sensitive barbels to help locate the presence of food. They have adapted to being active mainly under the cover of darkness. You are not going to change their natural behaviour by eliminating their hiding places. Doing this will only cause increased stress levels for the fish, while preventing you from observing and appreciating the natural behaviour of these nocturnal fish.



Nocturnal species.

To prove this, take a small flashlight and place a small piece of red plastic over the lens. Turn on the flashlight after dark and shine it in your tank. Fish will not be able to see the red light. You might be very surprised to see those elusive shy fish active and out having a grand old time. My friends, the fish are only doing what is natural for them. Some fish are, by design, quite timid and will only stay in view if they feel secure. Again, having sufficient hiding places is very important. In this case, it will actually increase the likelihood of seeing the fish more often.



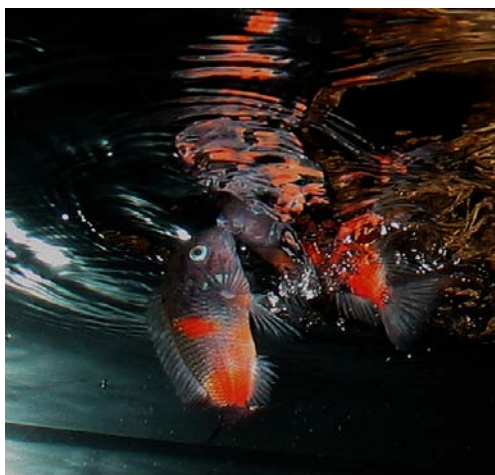
Tank with plenty of hiding spots.

If you select aggressive fish for a community tank, any peaceful species will hide in order to avoid being harassed. You can easily avoid such problems by knowing the general habits and behaviour patterns of your fish before you actually purchase them.

Take the time to think the habitat through well ahead of the actual fish purchase. If you need more rock add it. If you need more caves create them now. Doing all of this beforehand means you won't be adding more stress while the fish are settling into their new home.



Peaceful community tank fish.



Aggressive species.



**Relaxing in the living room.
Photo from Reid Wilson**

I have told numerous new hobbyists that done properly, fishkeeping does not need to cause anxiety and can actually become a real stress reliever. Most of us picked this hobby as a way to relax. Choose your fish carefully, do not overstock your tank, feed small amounts of food a few times each day. By doing regular water changes with regular tank maintenance, you will very soon discover that it isn't that difficult and can truly provide you many years of enjoyment with little effort on your part. - **Phil**