

Checklist

Before purchase make sure that:

- 1 You have the appropriate equipment and position for the aquarium.
- 2 You have researched all the species you are interested in and your final choices are all compatible.
- 3 You are familiar with how to transport and release your fish.
- 4 You are aware of the daily, weekly and monthly maintenance your aquarium will require.
- 5 You are prepared to look after your fish properly for the duration of their life.

Equipment

- 1 Glass or plastic aquarium
- 2 Gravel cleaner
- 3 Water testing kit
- 4 Tap water conditioner
- 5 Gravel
- 6 Filter
- 7 Food
- 8 Heater & thermometer

Before purchase make sure:

- 1 The aquarium is suitable for an adult of the species chosen
- 2 The water parameters are as advised in this leaflet
- 3 If adding to an existing set-up ensure the fish is compatible.



Never release your aquarium animals or plants into the wild

Never release an animal or plant bought for a home aquarium into the wild. It is illegal and for most fish species this will lead to an untimely and possibly lingering death because they are not native to this country. Any animals or plants that do survive might be harmful to the environment.

Important things to remember

Always buy...

test kits and regularly check the water for ammonia, nitrite, nitrate and pH. This will allow you to make sure the water in your aquarium is not causing welfare problems for your fish.

Establish a routine...

for testing the water in your aquarium. Record your results to enable you to highlight fluctuations quickly. Also check the temperature of the water.

Maintain...

the water in the aquarium within the accepted parameters highlighted in this leaflet. You may need to do regular water changes to achieve this.

Always wash your hands...

making sure to rinse off all soap residues, before putting them into your aquarium. Wash your hands again afterwards and certainly before eating, drinking or smoking.

Never siphon by mouth...

A fish tank can harbour bacteria which can be harmful if swallowed. Buy a specially designed aquarium gravel cleaner which can be started without the need to place the siphon in your mouth.



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If in doubt contact your OATA retail member for further information



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The voice of the ornamental fish industry

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How to care for...



Rare & unusual species

31 Tropical freshwater fish



Introduction

If you would like to keep a more unusual species in your freshwater tank, then the following three species could be an option. They are the freshwater river stingrays, knifefish and elephant noses.

This fish are not recommended for beginners due to their demanding needs and, in the case of stingrays, their dangerous nature.

Water requirements

These fish all require very good water quality. The guide below is a guideline as they can be acclimatised to other water types:

Temperature: 20 to 26°C

pH: 6.0 to 7.5

Ammonia: 0mg/l (0.02mg/l may be tolerated for short periods)

Nitrite: 0mg/l (0.2mg/l may be tolerated for short periods)

Hardness: Soft to hard (0 to 18°dH)

Biology

These fish get relatively large,. The stingrays can reach between 20 to 100cm width (the larger size is unlikely in an aquarium). Elephant noses may reach between 20 to 30cm and the knifefish between 30 to 100cm (again the larger size is unlikely in the home aquarium).

Stingrays are closely related to sharks as members of the Elasmobranchs, meaning they are cartilaginous fish. They have a venomous spine in their tails. Males can be identified by external sex organs known as claspers.

Elephant noses have an elongated lower jaw which looks similar to an elephant's trunk. This is used to find food and these fish can often be found probing the substrate in search of a meal.

Knifefish belong to the family Gymnotiformes and are characterised by the lack of dorsal and pelvic fins and an elongated anal fin which runs the entire length of the body. Much like the elephant nose, they have limited eyesight. Instead, they navigate their surroundings by emitting weak electrical impulses into the water and 'listening' to the electrical echoes in a similar manner to a bat using echolocation.

These fish can live for many years in a home aquarium with good water quality and without ailments.

Aquarium requirements

Due to the size this group of fish grow when mature, a large aquarium is required. The knifefish and elephant noses might be best provided with tanks of minimum volume 150 litres and the stingrays require a tank with a large base and volume of 300 litres minimum (the bigger the better).

Elephant noses are nocturnal species which do not like bright lighting, therefore the use of subdued lighting is recommended. The tank should have a soft substrate base such as sand so they can sift through it using their mouth extension.

A thermometer and heater are also required and if keeping these species a protective cover should be placed onto the heating element to avoid the fish burning themselves.

If keeping elephant noses or knifefish, the tank should be heavily planted with live plants. This helps to provide a natural environment for the fish as well as sheltered areas to retreat into as they are often shy and reclusive fish.

Maintenance

At least once every two weeks a partial water change of 25 to 30% is strongly recommended (a siphon device is useful to remove waste from the gravel). The water should be tested regularly to ensure pollutants such as ammonia and nitrites do not build up. Ensure you either allow the replacement water to stand or aerate it to remove any chlorine present. Ideally treat all replacement water with tap water conditioner before adding to the aquarium.

Filters should be checked for clogging and blockages. If the filter needs cleaning, then do not run it under the tap as any chlorine present may kill the beneficial bacterial population that has established in the media. Instead, it can be rinsed in the tank water which is removed during a partial water change as this reduces the amount of bacteria which are lost.

Good husbandry is essential as these fish can be stressed by even the smallest amounts of ammonia and nitrite. Test the water to monitor the ammonia, nitrite and nitrate levels every week, especially during initial set-up and after adding extra fish.

If this maintenance is taking place in a Stingray aquarium then great care needs to be taken if placing your hands into the aquarium. These fish have a venomous spine on their tail and can inflict injuries if threatened in their territory. Ideally hands should not be placed into the aquarium if it can be avoided.

Feeding

In the wild, these fish eat insect larvae and small crustaceans, and when adults can also feed upon small fish.

In the home aquarium, they should be fed sinking granules or pellets and supplemented with shrimps, prawns, beef heart, and live foods. If these fish are kept with fish which are aggressive feeders they may struggle to gain enough food, this is especially true for the elephant noses. These fish should be fed what they can eat within a few minutes 1 to 2 times a day. Remove any uneaten food to reduce waste build-up.

Potential problems

A water quality problem will affect fish behaviour and can be shown by clamped fins, reduced feeding, erratic swimming and gasping at the surface. Immediately test the water if any of these symptoms are shown. If in doubt ask advice from your OATA retailer.

Compatibility

It is recommended that stingrays are kept in species-only tanks, however they can be housed with larger non aggressive species if care is taken. The tank mates should be monitored to ensure compatibility.

None of these fish are compatible with small species as they will eat them, however they can be kept with larger peaceful fish. fAvoid housing the elephant noses with aggressive feeders as they will not receive enough food.

Breeding

Successful breeding of any of these fish species in home aquaria is rare and difficult. There is no discernible way to sex knifefish or elephant noses and little is known about their reproductive strategies.

There are a few cases of stingrays producing pups, although again it is difficult to mimic the required environment in a home aquarium.

