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, bogwood & rocks
6. Filter
7. Food
8. Heater & thermometer

Before purchase make sure:

1. Water parameters are as advised in this leaflet.
2. The aquarium in which the fish is to be housed is large enough for the adult of the species
3. If adding to an existing set up ensure the fish are 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.

Scan this code to download an electronic copy

If in doubt contact your OATA retail member for further information

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How to care for...

Tankbusters

38 Tropical freshwater fish

Introduction

Large fish, or *tank busters*, pack big personalities and can really become a member of the family. Just like any other pet animal, a large fish in the home can require a lot of commitment. Their greater longevity than smaller fish means that any decision to keep one of these fish should be made very carefully.

Because of their sheer size, there are a few aspects that are important to remember when keeping these fish.

Water requirements

Tank busters, like all fish, require good water quality. Tank buster species can be quite diverse and their water quality requirements should be fully researched before purchase. Normally, they need to be kept within the following parameters:
Temperature: 22 to 28 °C
pH: Approximately 6.5 to 8.0
Ammonia: 0mg/l (0.02mg/l may be tolerated for short periods)
Nitrite: 0mg/l (0.2mg/l may be tolerated for short periods)

Biology

A tank buster can be described as a fish that attains a final size that would be difficult to accommodate in most aquaria for sale. Tank buster species encompass many fish groups such as catfish (giraffe catfish), cyprinids (cigar sharks), characins (Pacu), gouramis (giant gourami) and many other species such as arowana and snakeheads. These species can grow between 60 to 90cms, and some can get even larger.

In many respects, tank buster species are similar to their smaller respective cousins. For example, the giant gourami (*Osphronemus goramy)* is an air-breathing bubble nester, just like the smaller, more familiar three-spot *Trichogaster* species. While the giant species is nearly 5 times the length of their smaller cousins, they are certainly much more than 5 times the weight. As any fish gets bigger, the weight of the fish scales up approximately three-fold in relation to their length and this can have implications with regards to their upkeep.

Large fish can consume more food and oxygen, and excrete more waste. Some may be described as messy feeders, which means that not all of the food offered will be consumed by the fish. Such factors can have a large bearing on the aquarium and filtration requirements.

Aquarium requirements

The size of these fish means an exceptionally large aquarium is required. While these fish can be kept in smaller aquaria when they are first purchased as small specimens, many of the tank busters grow very quickly. Therefore, when considering getting a tank buster, always make sure you are able to accommodate for their adult size. Alternatively, indoor heated ponds can be constructed to accommodate these animals.

The size of aquarium required may also be judged by their activity level. Some sedentary species, such as fire eels, while needing a large volume to be able to control water quality, may not need quite the same volume as active swimmers.

Big fish also have large stomachs and the unfortunate consequence of this is that they can also produce a lot of waste. A number of large aquarium filters, or even a pond filter, may be required to not only help keep the water quality under control, but also remove the large quantities of solid waste these fish produce.

Large fish also have a tendency to disturb aquarium décor and can sometimes knock over aquarium ornaments and plants. Any ornaments, including rocks placed in the aquarium should be securely positioned to avoid them from becoming dislodged and damaging your aquarium. Aquarium heaters should also be protected from damage.

Maintenance

At least once every two weeks a partial water change of 25 to 30% is strongly recommended (a siphon device is also useful to remove waste from the substrate). More frequent water changes (maybe every week) may be required to control the waste levels. The water should be tested regularly to ensure pollutants such as ammonia and nitrites don't build up. For convenience, a tap water conditioner can be used to instantly remove chlorine/chloramine from tap water. Alternatively, tap water can be aerated to drive off chlorine and chloramine, but can take a lot longer.

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 because 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.

Feeding

Large fish normally have very big appetites to match. They will often ignore most of the foods used to feed smaller fish. Instead, larger food items such as frozen mussel, shrimp, crickets and other similar items should be offered. Some will also accept pre-prepared foods. For some of the large vegetarian plecs, sinking algae wafers are normally accepted. Some will also relish wedges of cucumber which can be weighed down by attaching to a rock.

The carnivorous tank buster species do not require the same frequency of feeding as the smaller fish. A good meal no more than once a day should be sufficient. Fast swimming species may burn off more energy so may require feeding smaller amounts more frequently.

Always remove any leftover food from the aquarium to prevent the water quality from deteriorating.

Potential problems

Tank busters are equally susceptible to all of the diseases found on smaller aquarium fish. Water quality problems will also affect these big fish in a similar manner. Any unusual behaviour such as reduced appetite, erratic swimming and gasping at the surface may indicate a water quality problem. Immediately test the water if any of these symptoms are shown.

Compatibility

Owing to their big size and in most cases, their equally big mouths, mixing with much smaller fish should be avoided. Some tank busters can be particularly aggressive and may not mix with any other species. Vegetarian species are more likely to be compatible with other fish, but this may not always be the case. If in doubt, always ask your OATA retailer on a specific species aggression level and compatibility.

Breeding

The reproductive techniques used by tank busters varies from mouth brooding, bubble nesting and egg scattering. However, breeding tank buster species is seldom reported in home aquaria.