"KEEPING AND BREEDING PLECOS",

Talk by StephanTanner, GVAC, June, 2014

Longfin Bristlenose Pleco, Male

HABITAT

Stephan started out emphasizing the seriousness of habitat destruction occurring in South America, especially the Xingu River/dam project where many rare plecos come from. He is one of the few aquarists that have kept and bred the Zebra Plecos and stressed that, without captive breeding of several species, they may disappear. The Rio Xingu Dam will be the 3rd largest in the world, displacing 20,000 people and cutting off a long section of the river where Zebra Plecos are from. He also mentioned that many countries are getting more strict in allowing fish to be collected and exported, a warning to hobbyists to breed more fish or they may not be available. With deepwater plecos from the Xingu, water quality is most important, not pH or hardness. The Xingu River is 85-92 degrees all year, very clean, high dissolved oxygen, and virtually no nitrate.

TYPES OF FOOD

Food is very important for the health of plecos, and Steffan classifys them into 4 groups: carnivores, omnivores, grazers, and herbivores. Carnivores have larger teeth (e.g. whiptails) and they eat worms, insects, and snails. Omnivores eat different types of foods and are easier to feed and breed. The grazers are the most difficult to feed (e.g. Magnum Plecos and Golden Nuggets). They feed almost constantly and need high quality, low-calorie foods such as algae, leaf matter, detritus, green peas, zucchini, squash, and small insects. They cannot handle high protein flake foods or other meats. Sturisoma and Otocinclus are in

this group and have a reputation of being difficult to keep alive. Too much meaty or rich foods for them, including brine shrimp, and they become bloated and die.

PLANTS AND WOOD

The last group, herbivores, eat plants and wood. Royal Plecos and Clown Plecos are in this last group. They have larger teeth that shred the wood. Their gut contains special bacteria that will process cellulose. Usually wild caught plecos are treated with antibiotics. This can destroy those beneficial bacteria so the pleco will not be able to digest its' food and will waste away and die. Any wild- caught plecos that have a caved-in belly are suspected. Some trees' wood and leaves can be toxic. Stephan mentioned that birch, beech, oak, linden, and alder might be the safest to use for plecos. Mysis shrimp can be a good food for plecos because the shells help in digestion. Blood worms, however, sometimes harbor mycobacteria and can cause TB in fish, so he does not feed them. For prepared foods, he likes kelp, spiralina, and cyclopeze. He likes the pellet or wafer form of foods and feels that you get more value for your money with them over flake. Stay away from blood meal, bone meal, and meats in prepared foods. Starch and fats in foods can be undigestible and become rancid quickly. The "snub-nose syndrome" that can develop in plecos is not from genetics, but poor foods. Sexing different plecos can involve body size, tentacles, colors, head shape and size, fin shape and size, and shape of the lips. A proper breeding setup for plecos allows them to feel safe, and they especially like secure ceramic caves to breed in with low light conditions. Slate and wood can help. Find out that species natural habitat conditions to provide a better environment. If you feed plecos properly, they likely will not eat their eggs.

Chase Klinesteker