

The Brackish Aquarium

Written by

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by Dick Wallace

Why Not Give the Brackish Aquarium a Try?

Gleanings From The Old Rambler.....

What is brackish? According to Webster, it is :

adj. saltish, as water in saline soil: hence distasteful: nauseous.

My definition of brackish in a more aquatic sense might be the area including water, fish and other creatures between the pure fresh water environments and the seas. We could also include plants, but except for mangrove, most plants do not tolerate brackish conditions too well. The mangrove gets too large to be accommodated in our aquariums, so best we can normally do is to replace live plants periodically as they get looking too unkempt.

Some examples of brackish areas would be the mouths, including the deltas, of the various rivers of the world as they enter into the sea. Many coastal areas have back water bays that may harbor a multitude of very young fish life, since these back areas offer more protection to them, also being rich in smaller species of life, which would be a rich food source. Some of these various areas could be quite extensive in length with a varying salinity, due largely to the ocean tides working their way up river or gradually being washed back down river towards the river mouth. The force of a great river could extend the fresh water stream for some distance off the shoreline, creating different degrees of brackish conditions.

The osmoregulatory process, is the process whereby the salt and water present in the tissues of the fish is slowly brought to a state of equilibrium with that of the concentration present in their aquatic environment. Since the sea water is highly concentrated with salts, the marine fish normally secrete a fairly solid waste, aiding them in eliminating salts from their bodies. Freshwater fish normally retain the necessary salts in their bodies by secreting a very dilute form of urea. The fish that have come to be able to live in brackish areas have to adjust more readily to more frequent salinity changes. These adjustments are stressful to most fish and I would recommend, when they are necessary, that these saline changes be made gradually. Acclimating to brackish from freshwater or from marine should be done, if at all, very slowly, over several days. Brackish fish by their very nature, must be quite adaptable to salinity changes, even on a day to day basis.

There are many fish that do quite well in the brackish aquarium. Many of these fish should not be kept in small aquaria as they will get too large ; namely, the monos, both the golden (argenteus) and the silver (sebae), the archers, the scats, the silver shark cats and the datnoids. The monos and the scats, in particular, are more interesting, in my opinion, when they are allowed to swim in schools. All of the above fish, as adults, should be given a fairly large aquarium for their best interests.

There are several brackish puffers. Some of these are cute when they are small but some of them can get to be about six inches long, also they do become quite aggressive with other fish. The puffers do have a very strong mouth, almost like a small bird beak. I have seen them crush a snail's shell and spit out the shell remains. One time I saw a figure-eight puffer grab a smaller, spotted puffer in it's mouth and shake it like a dog might shake a rat. I would recommend that

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the puffer be kept in an aquarium by itself, species wise.

Some of the best brackish fish for the small aquarium are the bumblebee goby and the clown goby. Bumblebee gobies are territorial, but they are satisfied with a very small territory. I have seen where the bumblebee goby had spawned in a corner of a ten gallon brackish tank. The tiny eggs seemed to be attached to the glass by small threads. Something must have eaten the eggs, for they were gone the next day. Some people recommend the use of English Walnut, shell-halves as small spawning caves for the bumblebee. This fish is worthy of a small tank in your home.

Another set-up that sounds interesting to me, would be to try to somewhat duplicate a mangrove swamp. Of course you would not be able to have real mangrove but you could use artificial or real cypress knees in a long tank. I would suggest a homemade terrarium of glass possibly four to five feet long about three feet wide by eighteen inches high. This I would populate with four mudskippers and two archer fish, the water level about eight inches. The tank having siliconed, planting pockets, could possibly be planted with philodendrum. There would be several pieces of petrified rock here and there extending above the water level for the mudskippers. With a terrarium cover in place, winged insects could be liberated into the set-up, allowing us to watch the archers shoot down their prey. The outside biological filter could return water over a quaint waterfall in one of the back corners. Your imagination might help you come up with an even more interesting brackish terrarium.

There are many more fish that can be obtained for your brackish aquarium. We at Byerly's, are always ready to aid you in your selection of fish. Don't forget that I have compiled for your convenience a brackish notebook of magazine articles, pertaining to keeping brackish and the various fish that will do best in this environment. Also, in closing, I want to tell you about an out of print book on brackish, published by T.F.H., entitled, Brackish Aquariums, authored by Michael W. Gos. This book was advertised in T.F.H., magazines in the early 1980's. I hope that this little article will give some of you the desire to give brackish aquaria a try.

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