

# WET LEAVES



*a Series On Books For The Hobbyist*

by **SUSAN PRIEST**

**W**hat could I have been thinking? Clearly I wasn't thinking at all. I can't believe I let it happen. I have excuses. I was tired, I was anxious to turn the pages of M.A. over to the printer, and there was only one teentsy-weensy little blank page left to fill. I opened my mouth and out came the unexpected words "I'll write a book review." I'm a firm believer that once I say I will do something, then I will, but usually I run it by my brain first. Sooo . . .

Let's start out by answering the question "what are tankbusters?" Our authors describe them as "freshwater fishes that present a challenge to fishkeepers principally because they grow larger than most aquarium fish."

The first section consists of seven chapters, and discusses "Practical Matters" such as filtration and water management, aquascaping and feeding. The second, and larger, section is called "A Selection of Fishes."

The authors start you off with instructions on how to construct your own large aquarium. Information such as the fact that glass is less expensive, but acrylic is lighter and can be welded, and that large fish need enough room to turn around (in other words, "width counts") get you thinking big. They recommend that tanks in the size range of two meters (79 inches) long by 75cm (30 inches) wide be constructed "in situ," or on site, as they may not make it through the door. Personally, I don't have any experience with building tanks of any size, and therefore do not consider myself to be qualified to comment on whether their instructions are sufficient. I'll just add that they are quite detailed.

Who knew:

- 1) That Pacu (*Piaractus brachypomum*) are an active shoaling fish!
- 2) Sometimes the best net is a pillowcase.
- 3) The larger the fish, the faster it grows.
- 4) Some tankbusters need periods of fasting in order to stay in good health. (Do your homework on your own favorite species.)
- 5) "Filtration sand," available from pool supply stores, is a good alternative to a gravel substrate. (Maybe us keepers of small and moderate sized fish can give this a try, as well.)

It is time to move forward to "A Selection of Fishes." Ms. Sandford and Mr. Crow have chosen a narrative style. By that I mean that they are using sentences and paragraphs rather than icons, symbols, and other forms of graphics (as are often used in "atlas-style" books) to describe the fishes.

Among the groups of fishes represented are familiar names such as catfishes, lungfishes, and, of course, cichlids. Less commonly encountered fishes under discussion include paddlefishes, bony tongues, and Siamese tigerfish.

Let's return to our friends the Pacu, and see what else we can learn about them. First, they are Characins, and are endemic to northern South America. They are vegetarians. In the wild they eat fruits and seeds, along with occasional insects and other invertebrates. In captivity they favor peas, bananas, figs, and are especially fond of

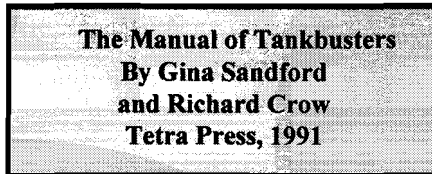
cherry tomatoes "which they eat in one gulp." When first introduced to a new environment, they exhibit a lot of anxiety. Little is known about their breeding behaviors, except that they do "make migratory spawning runs in large

shoals." They qualify as tankbusters because they can grow to be five feet long!

In addition to a table of contents and an index, there are some very well-crafted color illustrations, particularly in the section on building a tank. Many of the photos of fish overlap onto two facing pages. The effect of this style of presentation is that the photo has a deep crease in the center. Perhaps this was done with the intention of conveying the feeling of largeness, but I found it to be annoying. In spite of that, the exclusively color photography is a stunning enhancement to the text.

The subtitle to this book describes it as "An introduction to keeping and displaying large and impressive fish in the aquarium." The back of the dust cover makes the claim that "Whether you are an absolute beginner or an experienced aquarist, you will find much to interest you in this fascinating book." I would agree with both of these descriptions, and I would like to add that these fish are particularly eye-catching, and that this book might serve to attract young people to our very fulfilling hobby.

Well, I have done it; filled the final (which is not to say the last) page of the tenth (and largest) issue of the 13th volume of the third series of Modern Aquarium. It was surprisingly painless. Actually, I enjoyed it, and I hope you did, too.



**The Manual of Tankbusters**  
By **Gina Sandford**  
and **Richard Crow**  
Tetra Press, 1991