

WET LEAVES



a Series On Books For The Hobbyist

by SUSAN PRIEST

No one is more surprised than I am that I have been writing book reviews for **Modern Aquarium** since the first season of Series III. The introductory installment of *Wet Leaves* appeared in the November 1994 issue of **Modern Aquarium**, and the book under discussion was **You and Your Aquarium** by Dick Mills. You will run out of fingers before you can add it up, so I will do it for you. With this, the December 2008 issue, I have completed fifteen years of book reviews. That's a lot of *Wet Leaves*!!

With this milestone in mind I wondered if there was a title/topic I could choose to write about, something I could come up with that would serve to unify/exemplify this disparate body of work. Not knowing exactly what I was looking for, exactly what I was looking for seemed to reach out and find me. Extraordinary! I came across a book about a fish with a long-standing and universal popularity among generations of fishkeepers: a book about a fish which I have never discussed before.

If the cover of **Aquarium Care of Oscars** looks familiar to you, this is most likely because it belongs to the same series as **Aquarium Care of Cichlids**, which was authored by our own Claudia Dickinson. They are both part of the Animal Planet Pet Care Library. Neal Pronek and Brian M. Scott are most likely familiar to you as well, through

Aquarium Care of Oscars
By Neal Pronek
And Brian M. Scott
T.F.H. Publications, 2006

their many contributions to **Tropical Fish Hobbyist Magazine**.

The scientific name of the Oscar is *Astronotus ocellatus*, which means "marked with a star" and "bearing an eyespot." The derivation of the common name "Oscar" is unknown.

Being a dog owner myself, I couldn't help but to be amused at the ways in which our authors compared the behaviors of Oscars to those of dogs. For example(s): They can be stubborn, willful, and will approach their owner to be petted. They like to play with "toys," so keep a variety of safe playthings available for them. Oscars can become bored, so you may need to change the toys frequently. (What! No belly rubs?)

Oscars are basically loners, but they can accept carefully chosen tankmates. There is a list of suggested suitable choices on page 69, and a list of unsuitable choices on page 71. Warning: "Eels are best avoided!"

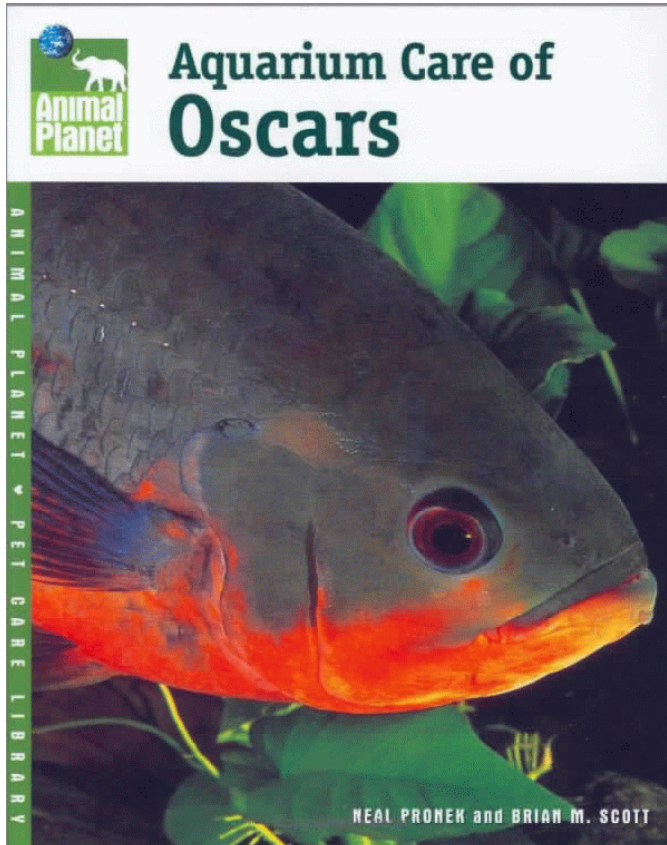
Raise your hand if you do weekly testing of your water chemistry. As I suspected, Neal and Brian are the only people with their hands up!

They counsel us that "Making frequent water changes is the single most positive action an Oscar owner can take to insure the good health of his or her fish."

Feeding your Oscars is not a challenge. The

operative word is variety. For convenience and economy, try giving them pelleted foods which are marketed for koi or trout. (Start with a sample sized supply to make sure they like it.) Feeder fish, meal or earth worms, and fresh shrimp will be eagerly consumed. Don't forget that "Oscars love bugs!"

When it comes to health issues, Oscars are more prone to injuries than illness. They are a bit lazy, and can sometimes be seen "sitting around."



Don't worry that they might be ill unless you observe other signs and symptoms.

Page 64 contains "Ten Tips to Proper Quarantine." Most of these can safely be applied to the arrival of any variety of fish. I do take issue with number nine, which says that lowering the water level will allow better gas transfer at the surface. I can't see that this will do anything other than reduce the total water volume, which could only contribute to a faster deterioration of the water quality. Anyway, you will want to see the whole list.

The photos remind me of a family album. There are grandma and grandpa, aunt Mary is on the next page, and there is cousin Roy with that kid from next door (I can never remember his name). He was always hanging out in our tanks, and showed up in at least half of the family photos. (Sorry! I was just entertaining myself for a moment.)

Breeding and Beyond (chapter seven), goes into excruciating detail as to how to acquire a breeding pair of Oscars. The conventional wisdom of starting out with ten to twelve juveniles, letting them grow up together and then pair off, is not practical

with such large fish. You cannot tell the males from the females by looking at them, and even if you could, these fish are very picky in their choice of a mate. The possible solutions to this problem go on for several pages, and eventually reach the conclusion that you may never be able to come up with a breeding pair. When and if you do, you will observe them cleaning a fairly flat site to their liking, and then laying their eggs. "The eggs will be laid in strings or rows that generally follow a round pattern." They should hatch in about a day and a half, and won't need to be fed until they are free-swimming.

The list of "Associations and Societies," is admittedly short, and focused mostly on national groups. However, I'm sure it was just an oversight that our authors didn't include the GCAS. Or perhaps they don't know about us, and we should invite them to a meeting!

This book is easy to read and understand. The pictures make you feel like you already know these fish. The authors were writing for "new Oscar owners of all levels of experience." If that describes you, then this book is a must-have.



A Different Place

by Susan Priest

Recently I was shuffling through some stuff (those of you who have visited my home have a clear picture in your minds of what this might be like), and I came across a lonely copy of **Modern Aquarium** from December, 2003. It has articles by Bernie Harrigan, Dora Dong, and Joe Ferdenzi, and a beautiful brilliant blue damselfish on the cover. It also contains a brief piece by me about holiday cheer. When I read it I had to pause and take a deep breath. I thought to myself "I am in a very different place now than I was then."

I'm talking about a different place mentally and emotionally. I live in the same house, work at the same job, and even keep most of the same fish, but my inner self is elsewhere. I have different concerns, different opinions, and more people to pray for. I suspect that the same could be said for most of you.

So, wherever you find yourself in December 2008, take to heart some slightly dusty words. "While we have time, let us celebrate life in all of its forms, and all of its possibilities. While we have time, let us follow our star. Choose carefully what you want to celebrate, and then celebrate it well."

As for me, I am celebrating the birth of love, and tomorrow's sunrise.

