

# Dyed-In-The-Wool Hobbyist Tells About Hobby In Mexico

by Sam Calderon

We left Chicago during the July 4th holidays last year, and, as you will recall, the temperatures were the normal 95 degrees and up that are expected for this month. The trip down here was made in our station wagon and after we had fitted in the 6 children, 2 dogs, necessary clothing, and miscellaneous articles we were hard put to find any space to put our previously selected tropical fish. I had to reduce by considerable margin the fish I could bring with me. We brought down with us 8 half grown Black Angels and approximately 50 two-week old Sternke guppies and three pair of 4-month-old Sternke's plus an assortment of the rarer type plants.

We ran into very hot weather in Texas and sad to relate the Black Angels did not survive the trip. By the time we arrived at our Monterrey destination I had only the Sternke guppies and a pair of Golden guppies of my own development that showed promise of being something very different.

## **Livestock drinking trough for aquarium**

The temperatures in Monterrey ranged from 100 degrees to 120 degrees during our initial two-month-period and I was hard put to keep even the guppies alive. The home that we had moved into was not air-conditioned and the water was almost always up in the high 90's. Constant additions of fresh tempered water and ice cubes kept the fish alive.

Meanwhile, I received permission to empty out an old live-stock drinking trough that the landlord had converted into a flower bed. A few patches here and there converted this into a container to hold approximately 200 gallons of water. After the usual precautionary measures, I introduced the Sternke's into this water. In three days the water was vivid green and I couldn't tell whether anything alive was in it. Realizing that I could possibly lose all the fish, I kept a few in the aquariums I had brought down with me as a safeguard. About this time, I had to make a trip into the interior of Mexico and upon my return my first concern, after perfunctory greetings to my wife

and children, was to take a net and check the guppies in the improvised pool. Lo and behold they had survived.

## **Move to permanent residence**

Approximately, two months later we moved from this temporary dwelling into what we think is our permanent residence. I very carefully drained the pool and we were very richly rewarded by the sight of approximately 4 to 5 hundred robust youngsters showing every attribute of their famous strain. I transferred these fish to our new locale and placed them in a pool 15 feet long by 33 inches wide by 1-foot deep. I planted a few water plants, placed some water hyacinths and two dwarf water lilies in this pool then sat back to watch the results.

By this time cold weather was beginning to come in (believe it or not, our thermometer has indicated 36 degrees at least a dozen times since we have been here) and we lost approximately 200 half grown guppies during the first cold snap in November due to an overnight change in temperature.

## **About the Author**

Less than a year ago, Sam Calderon and his lovely wife, Lupe, owned and operated the Tropical House, an excellent tropical fish retail store located at 1852 W. 35th St., Chicago. As an engineer for Kraft Foods, however, Sam left most of the details of the store in the hands of Lupe.

When Kraft Foods decided to send him to Monterrey in an executive engineer capacity, Sam was jubilant — not only with the promotion, but with the prospect of seeing what's what with the hobby South of the Border.

He turned the store over to his brother, Emanuel, and then Sam, Lupe and the kids piled into their station wagon and "away they went."

They give their best regards to all their friends in Chicagoland and extend the welcome mat for any of their aquarist friends anywhere who are going to Mexico on vacation this summer.

Friends can write him at Kraft Foods de Mexico S.A. de C.V., Apartado Postal 1687, Monterrey, N.L. Mexico.



These particular fish were in three 20-gallon galvanized tubs and the temperature drop was sufficient to kill them all. The fish in the large pool survived.

Immediately, I took measures to keep any sudden temperature changes from killing more fish. I resorted to submerged light bulbs in an effort to maintain even temperatures and immediately wired to Chicago for heaters. I went down to the border to pick up the heaters and now the heaters plus a plastic covering over the pool have maintained the water temperature at a constant 72 to 75 temperature. The guppies have grown considerably in number and size and I only wish that I had the ready market for them here that we have in the States.

**Main diet—Wardley's & Longlife foods**

Live food is somewhat of a problem. There isn't a permanent body of water of

any size around here. The closest is a stream near a water dam approximately 25 miles from here. Outside of mosquito larva, crushed snails, and some chopped worms, the main-stay of their food diet has been an always reliable Wardley and Long-life product. Just two weeks ago a local resident, an avid fish fancier, gave me the glad news that she had finally cultivated a very good growth of daphnia in three of her outside pools. She very graciously let me have some to feed my fish.

I might add that I now have two 20-gallon tanks and one 30-gallon tank that are exclusively for show — in which I have nothing but male guppies of the Sternke strain. Because of the heavy loss of half grown males most of the males that I now have are between 2 and 4 months of age and have not reached their full stage of development. The few fish of any proportion have been sufficient to create quite an impression on the fish fanciers that have visited our home. The majority of them immediately wish to purchase a pair but I have set a price of 200 pesos (\$16.00 American dollars) per pair and the people of Monterrey have a world renown for tight fistness that rivals that of our Scottish friends. There have not been many buyers at that price. But I will not permit the strain to go out at anything less than this, preferring to maintain reduced numbers of very rigorously selected stock, and selling them right.

I visited with the purchaser of a trio of these fish just recently and since this woman is one of Monterrey's top fish fanciers she has done a marvelous job of raising the

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**Lupe and Sam Calderon**

fry. She goes to complete extremes in an effort to maintain her guppies on a complete live food diet and the results are very evident. I firmly believe that my introduction of these guppies into Mexico will in a very short time place the Mexican tropical fish fanciers on a competitive basis that will be hard to beat.

### **Hobbyist's dream comes true**

I have been rambling, as you have read, from my entry into Mexico on through to what I now have in my own small pool and tanks. I will now tell you a little bit of what all of us dyed-in-the-wool fish fanciers dream of doing in our spare time.

As previously mentioned, there isn't much water in Monterrey, that is, nothing that will support fish life or aquatic life in any proportion worth mentioning. I have been out on two Sunday trips into areas that local residents have pointed out as being capable of supporting aquatic life. I have found these areas to be few and far between and at first glance incapable of supporting anything. But much to my surprise, very careful searching of these small streams (some no more than 8" deep) has provided me with a few specimens of fish life which we are very familiar with.

On the fringes of a very small dam, I found Firemouths (*C. meeki*) by literally, the thousands. The wife and I seined this area pulling out hundreds of specimens of *C. meeki*, some Helleri, green Mollies, and a species of Molly with a yellow splotched dorsal and some small plain looking olive-drab live bearers. Last, but not least, thousands of Tetra Buenos Aires.

Since I have had little time to devote to searching out bodies of water, I am pleased with what I have found and I am going to devote a little more time to these excursions in the very near future.

### **Unusual fern-like plant**

As to plant life, I have not found anything different from what we have in the States. I do have a very beautiful specimen of a fern like plant of which I am going to take photos and send to *Tropicals Magazine*. Maybe one of your readers will know this plant and classify it for me. I personally have never seen it before and found it just a little bit difficult to acclimate to aquarium water, I now have a piece about 10" long which is flourishing very nicely. On my next trip to the States, I will bring some with me.

The water down here is about 14 points hardness and I continue to find it very difficult to grow hygrophila and water sprite. I brought some ceratophyllum with me which just wouldn't get started. I managed to locate one tiny piece in a special little container and this began to flourish very well. From this one spray, I now have enough so that I have some very handsome sprays in my show tanks and also in the outside pool. Ceratophyllum, much to my amazement, is one plant that the local fanciers say they have never been able to propagate. So here I am a new-comer, who doesn't know any better, and have succeeded simply because, like the bumble bee, no one told me I couldn't do it.

### **One retail fish outlet in 500,000 city**

Having once settled down to the point where I could begin looking around for the local fish shops, I was very much surprised to find that in a city boasting of 500,000 inhabitants there wasn't even one tropical fish store as we know them. The fanciers here have learned to buy their fish from either friends, who have surplus fish to sell, from some intrepid souls who raise fish in small outdoor pools, or those who buy their fish for resale across the border, namely, in Texas.

The only reliable source for fish supplies, accessories and, of course, the fish themselves was and is Mr. Adan Guerra. He and his sisters are the people from whom you buy fish in Monterrey. I visited his home and found fish representative of what we would consider the beginner's category, mostly live bearers. I questioned him as to the lack of variety in both fish and plants

and his answer was that he must fly or drive into San Antonio for his fish, plants, and miscellaneous supplies. The original cost plus transportation, plus custom duties, plus the usual mortality, raise the cost of fish to almost a prohibited level (based on the average salaries received in this area). However, the prices are very much in line with what we ask for fish in Chicago.

Mr. Guerra, with the aid of his sisters, does a nice job of breeding Angels. He is at present hoping to raise some Black Angels to a size that can be bred. Since the mainstay of their business is based on the sale of live bearers, their outside pools fairly abound with platies, helleris, guppies, and mollies.

#### **Retail store opened by Mr. Guerra**

Since my arrival here in Monterrey, Mr. Guerra has opened up a Tropical Fish store which is very nicely set up and should develop into a paying proposition before too long. Since his is the only shop, good advertising and a good stock of fish, plants, and accessories should quickly make his shop a point of interest to visiting hobbyists.

I gave Mr. Guerra two issues of Tropicals Magazine and he showed a keen interest in what we are doing in developing the fish

hobby. His comment was, "Too bad this isn't readily available in Spanish." It gives me something to think about.

I intend to take photos of Mr. Guerra's shop and I will send them to TROPICALS at the earliest possible time. I realize that I have rambled back and forth but you should be able to pick up enough information here to give you an idea to what is happening in the fish world of Monterrey.

The temperature has warmed up now, and I intend to make some field trips in pursuit of the rare plant or rare fish that I hope to find some day. I intend to write you a completely detailed report of one of these trips which should make for interesting reading.

#### **Valley Aquarium Society Re-Elects Ed Simmons as President**

The Valley Aquarium Society, Phoenix, Ariz., has re-elected Ed Simmons as president. Other officers of the club are: W. Cecil Armstrong, vice pres.; Dana Simmons, sec'y.; and Ron K. Hardin, treas. Trustees are Clarence Rieger, Pat Schneider and Dr. Robert Ripley.

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