

MAINLY FOR SENIORS

By Jack Leahy

Fast-Growing Hobby

Aquarium tanks are frequently seen in the offices of doctors and dentists and in the lobby and lounge areas of hospitals and nursing homes. They are put there not only for decorative purposes but also because the graceful motions and brilliant hues of tropical fish have a tranquilizing effect on most people.

Perhaps the most popular aquarium fish in the world is the guppy, a variety named for the British botanist R. J. Lechmere Guppy, who discovered it while on a plant research project in Trinidad in the early 1900's. Today, it is estimated that 20 million hobbyists collect and breed the small fresh-water fish.

In a large measure, the guppy owes its widespread popularity in the United States to Paul Hannel, 63, of the Bronx, who lays strong claim to having introduced the fancy guppy to this country.

"I got my first guppies in 1913," recalls Hannel, a cabinetmaker by trade. "They were the 10-cent common type and they looked like toothpicks. The first 'tank' I had for them was my grand-mother's water barrel in Dresden Germany, where I was born.

"There were eight of them and out of these tiny things, I made beautiful fish in two to three years. In nature, guppies are merely food for larger fish. But my guppies do not exist in nature. They were made by me under strict, artificial environmental control."

Although he has no formal scientific training, Hannel has achieved international recognition and acclaim through his hobby. A particularly beautiful strain of veiltail guppy which he developed bears his name as a descriptive adjective and prized by knowledgeable collectors. His home is filled with plaques and trophies awarded by aquarium societies from several countries. In recent years, Hannel has been called upon to judge breeders competitions in Berlin, London, New York, Hawaii and elsewhere.

"My teacher was personal experience," says the self-made expert, who immigrated to this country in 1923. "I read a lot of books too, but it was what I observed that helped me the most. I found that cleanliness ever more than good food is necessary for the best breeding results. The guppy's own wastes will poison it unless the water is completely changed periodically".

Hannel's apartment aquarium consists of 17 tanks containing more than a 1,000 guppies on any given day. Helping him with the care of all these chores are his wife, Martha and their daughter Ruth, an 18 year old City College math major. While she doesn't share her husband's complete absorption in his hobby, Mrs. Hannel finds it easy to understand.

"Under perfect conditions," she explains, "guppies will bear offspring after a gestation period of 28 days. They are life bearers and to me, there is nothing more fascinating than being able to watch the life cycle of a

creature as it is born and matures.

“As a hobby, there are many other reasons to recommend an aquarium. For one thing, it is very easy to take care of – even people in wheelchairs have no trouble. Secondly, in many apartment buildings where other pets are not allowed, there are no objections to fish tanks.

The late Sir Winston Churchill was a fish fancier who maintained aquarium tanks and ponds at his country estate in Chartwell, England. One of his biographers recalls hearing the British statesman say: “I find the contemplation of the fish one of the greatest forms of relaxation I have ever known.

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Guppy breeder Paul Hannel adds another trophy to the large collection of awards he has won through his hobby. The 63 year old cabinetmaker's wife, Martha and daughter, Ruth, beam with approval at Bronx apartment.



This veiltail Hannel guppy took two to four years to develop. It is 1 1/2 inches long.



Living room of the Hannel home is rally “alive” with 17 aquarium tanks. According to Hannel, cleanliness is the most important environmental factor in breeding guppies.

News Photos by David McLane.

It’s amazing what you can find in your basement after so many years. Frank Schulerbrandt 04/19/2016