

Livebearer News

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BRITISH LIVEBEARER ASSOCIATION



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Editorial by Paddy Davies

By now most people will know about the passing of Howard Preston on the 28th of January following a massive stroke. Howard was a true pioneer of the hobby and one of the first British hobbyists to bring back wild livebearers to the UK in the 1970's, This included *Xiphophorus kallmani* from the area around Lake Catemaco, although at this time it was not described as a new species so was just thought of as a yellow swordtail. He also brought back a collection of *Xiphophorus milleri* that still exists in the hobby. Our condolences go to his family and friends.

I first got to know Howard in 2009 when we went to Cuba with Don Kenwood, looking for *Girardinus* and *Gambusia*, since then we became good friends and I will remember his enthusiasm and tenacity always.

This magazine contains a reprint of an article by Myron Gordon that was the inspiration for Howard's first trip to Mexico, we also have another reprint: an article by Howard on swordtails from the Southern Livebearer Aquarists Group journal from 1985- the acronym of this group S.L.A.G always raising a chuckle from Howard!

Other Articles include a tribute to Howard from Don Kenwood, who has known Howard for many years, as well as Howard's last article, an account of a fishy Holiday to his beloved Jamaica in 2010.

We also have an article on keeping *Allodontichthys tamazulae* - by Gary Randall, this is a fantastic, charismatic *Goodeid* that should be kept at least once in my opinion, thanks Gary.

Finally – A call to arms, the spring convention is only days away! In order to make it a success please come along and say hi, we would love to see you, also please try and bring some of your home bred fish – even a pair is fine, even in these internet dominated times some fish are being kept and bred in the some areas but in short supply in others, hopefully we can help to address this by bringing a wide range of species to the auction. If you have any questions about the auction or need advice on transporting fish, please contact Nigel Hunter.2

I hope you all enjoy reading this edition, please do email your comments, suggestions and offers of articles (?) to me.

Paddyd99@gmail.com

Chairman's Report by Chris Cheswright

Last winter the snow was lying deep on the house roof. One morning I went to the fish house (the garage to others) and noticed some extra snow on the ground. On opening the fish house door I was confronted with the sound of dripping water and a heater on full blast. Yes the roof had partially caved in as the snow slid off and hit the roof (which was in need of repair). After the initial shock I realised it was possible to do some temporary repairs (it had started to leak anyway) to hold it up until the warmer weather. This and a lorry tarpaulin laid over the top (very handy to have in the garden shed!). Come the summer the roof was rebuilt and now is far better insulated and is waterproof once again. Why am I telling you

this? Well beware of disasters, but more importantly it made me put fish breeding and restocking on hold for a bit.

So coinciding with the restarting of the BLA I am also hoping to get going again on some more serious fish breeding (rather than keeping) and a chance to have a bit of a think as to what fish (my interest is in livebearers, killifish and characins) to try out, my problem, like many of us (I've seen you leaving an auction with 2 boxes of fish and only 20 tanks at home!) is to limit the species and focus more on maintaining and breeding these rather than continually acquire more and more - I anticipate failure however as it is so easy to give in. I have similar problems with plants, in particular an ever growing collection of insect eating plants (half a 12x8 greenhouse), orchids and the rest.

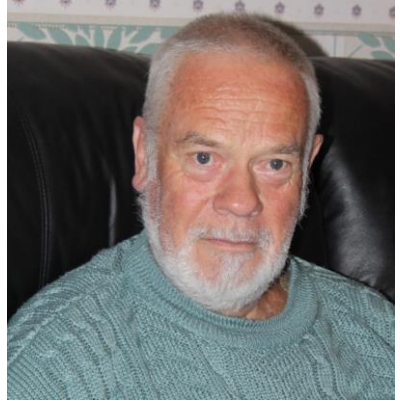
The keeping of livebearers as a group has been the way I have succeeded in the past with a number of species, but unless you keep a good check on them it is easy to lose a whole colony through a variety of reasons; thinking they are doing well only to have a die off or find they are all males! It is essential still to keep good regular checks on our fish and separate out pregnant females or remove young fry if they are to be kept going. Howard Preston had a good plan that consisted of depositing a few pairs of each of his fish at various fish keepers and then doing 'secret shopper' visits to make sure you were breeding them! The first time this happened to my Dad was when he arrived at Heathrow with so many fish that Chris Lion had to hire a car to get them back to Southend. He also had nowhere to put them (these were pioneering days) and this started my Dad in the Livebearing hobby and eventually to the keeping of wild type livebearers in the UK, Europe and further afield. For those of you who knew Howard he will be missed for his impromptu visits and very good knowledge of livebearing fishes.

The moral of all this, if there is one, is that sometimes there is a lull in activities but this can determine us to get going again and use our experience to restart and reshape the BLA.

Howard Preston by Don Kenwood

Picture Kim Jones

Wednesday 28th January 2012 heralded the end of an era. Following a massive stroke on the previous Sunday, the supporting machines were finally turned off and the life of a legend, Howard Preston, quietly slipped away. Howard had come back into my life a few years ago after a long lapse. I knew him first in the late 1970's after acquiring and keeping some of the fish he had brought back from his expeditions to Mexico and the Dominican Republic. Howard was so enthusiastic, a fore-runner in our hobby by actually going out to catch those fish which had hitherto only been seen by most of us in books.



Included in this addition you will find tributes and accounts of Howard's life and activities as well as one of his last articles.

For myself, I must remember the person who most recently re-entered my life, the eccentric character, who was Howard.

After seemingly dropping off the radar, he reappeared in June 2008.

Typically unannounced, he appeared at the Bristol Tropical fish Club Open Show with the main purpose of meeting me to extract what information he could about Jamaica, having booked a holiday there. Unfortunately, circumstances kept me away from the show that day but undeterred he found my telephone number and found me at home. I was able to pick him up and transport him to a local hostelry (I was to discover that this was most suitable as he was a great lover of the ale). We exchanged notes and I gave him my map and notes of where I had found fish.

In subsequent years, I learnt much more about Howard, his love of good food, of good real ale, rum (it was a bottle a night between him, myself and Paddy in Cuba), of the West Country, Trains, Buses (complete timetables absorbed in minutes and repeated whenever the need arose), weather patterns, his love of a good soak in the bath and not in the least his love of life. His ability to turn up on the doorstep unannounced was legendary, often staying more than the originally announced one night. (more rum to be consumed). This renewed friendship developed further with collecting trips to Cuba and Jamaica.

It was on this last trip to his beloved Jamaica when he finally fell ill with a minor stroke, one which only affected his eyesight but which brought him much discomfort and frustration.

Subsequently I have been involved in trying to refurbish his rather neglected house in Braintree, ably assisted I must say by Paddy Davies. Howard was not, however, able to return to the comfort of his own home before he passed away as it had not been completed.

I hope you are now resting in peace, Howard, ever to be remembered. Don

Swordtails from Veracruz and the Origin of my spotted strain by Howard Preston

Editor's note:

This article was originally printed in the Southern Livebearers Aquatic Group (SLAG) Journal 26 1985. I have included this article as it illustrates Howard's personality, enthusiasm and constantly enquiring mind – enjoy.

The following article is by Howard Preston was one of SLAG's first collectors and brought in many species new to this country. Howard is particularly interested in *Xiphophorus* and amongst the fish he brought in was a general favourite *Xiphophorus xiphidium* both two spot and (his personal find) the spotted form.

In or about 1959 Dr Myron Gordon in his booklet swordtails as pets TFH publications described how he had found a rare black spotted variety in several wild populations of *Xiphophorus helleri*. He commented that this trait was something of a mystery, as it was restricted to about only one percent of the wild population: yet in the aquarium it was inherited as a simple dominant Mendelian gene, the inference of course being that it would tend to spread widely through the stock. This information was not remembered by me until some thirteen year later and I had the opportunity to visit Mexico myself.

I was in Mexico shortly before Christmas 1972 with Christopher Lyon (then of Southend A.S) and my father, We had driven eastwards from the arid central plateau down past the rain-shrouded volcanic peak in the vicinity of Mighty Mount Orizaba, through the city of Jalapa (famous for its coffee as well as its university) and reached our first fish filled river, at a place named Puente Nacional, near Rinconda. Here a tremendous torrent of water tumbled down from the Jealap Mountains towards the Gulf of Mexico and here we found our first real Mexican swordtails.



There were other fish too, in abundance, including *Gambusias*, *Heterandria bimaculata*, mollies, tetras and cichlids. As dusk was rapidly approaching (this happens about 6pm in Mexico in December) we captured just a few young specimens and headed for the tropical gulf coast city of Veracruz, some 39 miles further to the south east.

We found Accommodation in a poor and noisy motel at the back of town, but it was cheap! Veracruz was worth a day or twos visit in its own right. So after 2 or 3 days of successfully exploring the states of Veracruz and Tabasco further to the east, we returned to the city to find a friendlier and slightly better hotel (about half a star!) nicely located across the road from the beach on the Villa del Mar. This was Christmas Eve, and I had vivid memories of the firecrackers (sold on every street corner) exploding all over the city that evening. Next morning Christmas Day, we woke to torrential rain showers drifting in from the Gulf; but the weather quickly cleared and it was possible to sunbathe in stifling heat on the beach all morning. This made me restless and with 4 or 5 hours of daylight left (never mind the Christmas dinner!!!) we took the car and explored inland taking two or three local roads.

In particular, we fished the rio Jamapa at Soledad de Doblado, and in the Rio Moreno (?) (or Rio Otapa) at the spot where it flowed under Highway Mex 145, south of La Tinaja.

There remains some doubt about the names of some of these rivers as the ordinary tourist map does not always agree with the local signs!!! I am even now attempting to obtain better maps from Erick Hnilicka. Although we failed to find the Rio Jamapa strain of *X maculatus* that day we took a good number of other fishes, and returned to Veracruz



that evening, tired but with a collection including *Gambusia* "Psuedos" (*H. bimaculata*) *X. helleri* and mollies. Of course I already had a few *X. helleri* captured just a few days earlier at Puente Nacional, not to mention numerous fishes captured in other areas already described.



In our gloomy hotel that evening after the usual water changing routine, I was inspecting the latest acquisitions and realised to my delight that one young swordtail (about one inch long) was developing the black spotted pattern (it Doesn't show fully until maturity). This fish was to survive all the rigours of the journey back to England and it eventually

developed into a fine male.

We had caught all these *X. helleri* in the vicinity of Veracruz and it was convenient even, perhaps essential to transport them all together, although a pity we had to do so. So they were mixed up at first but have been maintained as a pure strain (if that is the right description) ever since. I Think it is unlikely that my present aquarium stocks owe any ancestry to the Puente Nacional fishes which were actually kept on their own and bred readily enough in captivity, but this was in pre S.L.A.G days and the strain was eventually lost. On subsequent visits to Puente Nacional I have failed to find any *X. helleri*, but this does not necessarily mean that they are not there, it may be just due to seasonal variations in water flow, perhaps not to mention the very restricted time for fish collecting. In 1979 I had just about 15 minutes there!!! So the Present aquarium stock (as regards the 1972 'Veracruz' collection) is probably a mixture of Rio Jamapa and Rio Otapa fishes. the exact parentage will never be known now and there may be a contribution from other locations in the area. Therefore these fishes are not much use for scientific purposes, but having admitted that they have much to commend them.

As already mentioned, there was just one black spotted fish amongst this group, and to perpetuate this pattern it was necessary to mate it with a plain wild coloured (green) female from the same stock. At the same time, green (unspotted) fish were mated together so that eventually two strains evolved, spotted and unspotted. The initial result of the spotted, unspotted mating was roughly in accordance with expectations, about 50 per cent of the offspring coming through with the spotted pattern and the other 50 percent plain green. Since that time I have generally mated two spotted fishes together, but they

continue to throw a percentage of plain, green fry, which until now I have discarded. There are other variable factors in these *X.helleri*, such as the colour of the males sword: this can be anything from green through yellow to orange. Also, occasionally some males sport a 'bright' dorsal fin, with more red than usual. These fish grow quite large at first and I had a couple of good show males for several months, one gaining a 'Best in Show' though I imagine some F.B.A.S Judges must have had some choice comments to make on being confronted by my non-standard monster (spotted).

Obviously after four or five generations in 18" and 24" tanks, with probably an inadequate diet, there has been some loss in size but I believe the genetic potential for 3 and 4" males is still there and only needs some hard work by an enthusiast with the right facilities to restore proper size. Actually this is a good strain for the show bench since the tail spikes are long and straight and give the impression of being a bigger male than is the case, as with most *Xiphophorus*. In nearly every brood there is always a percentage of males which sex out early and these, while they may be the most vigorous breeders will always stay small. Conversely there may also be a small number of late developing males these will become the big fish

This brings us to the obvious question- do we need new blood in the strain? In my opinion we should wait a little longer yet, perhaps two or three years even; that's not many generations. We have the new blood in our tanks already, because the spotted fish can simply be crossed back to the plain green from which they came six years ago. And the unspotted green sword so far unwanted, which are the by product of the spotted strain, I am now collected and can be crossed with the existing (plain) green fish and hopefully some improvement might result. This would be without bringing in new blood from a completely different river system.

Members sales and wanted:

Clive Walker is looking for a Piston air pump in working order, please contact clivewalker076@gmail.com

Keeping *Allodontichthys tamazulae* my way by Gary Randall

Scientific Name: *Allodontichthys tamazulae*

Habitat: This species is endemic to the Rio Tuxpan and its tributaries in the state of Jalisco, Mexico.

Common Name: Tuxpan Darter Goodeid, Peppered Splitfin.

Size: Up to 70mm but usually about 55mm.

Colouration: Both sexes are basically brown with some mottling, although males have more pronounced markings.

Maintenance:

I find they do best when kept in large tanks, an aquarium 36" (90cm) in length would be ideal. A *tamazulae* can get aggressive amongst themselves, therefore they should be given plenty of cover and hiding opportunities, it also helps to keep a group of 8 or more individuals as any aggression is spread out and while chasing will occur, no real damage is done.

This species spends most of its time in the lower and bottom part of the tank. To provide cover for adults and young to hide, a good option is to use a heap of large pebbles or alternatively use small or pieces of terracotta plant pots as these can make good caves for the fish. A Weekly Water change of 40%-50% suits them fine



**Breeding:**

They do well kept at 64-72°F (18-23°C). When kept at about 72°F they will feed well on live foods and they breed regularly with a gestation period of about 8 weeks. Brood sizes can be from 7 upwards but are usually usually less than 20. If giving sufficient hiding places some fry may survive, however this is rare, the adults will usually chase and kill or even eat their fry if given the chance. To prevent this, I like to put the gravid female in a tank of about 10 gallons with a layer of Flocor (a plastic corrugated pond filter media) covering at least 90% of the bottom of the tank and add a few floating plants. I also lower the water level to about 6" (15cm), once the fry are born, either remove them or the female to prevent predation. I find this method works very well for collecting the new born fry.

General Remarks:

I feel that some live food should be always be included in the diet. Although *A. tamazulae* is not a fussy fish and will take all flake and frozen foods.

I feed a mainly live food diet, consisting of water fleas (*Daphnia*), grindal worm, white worm, and when available blood worm

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All views expressed herein are the opinions of the contributor and do not necessarily reflect the views or opinions of the BLA.

The print date for the next issue is 31st June 2012, could all contributors please ensure that articles are provided to the Editor by the end of May 2012.

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Notes on Jamaica 2010 by Howard Preston

I was lucky enough to visit Jamaica again late in 2010 but it was a holiday rather than a collecting trip. As I have said in the past, if you are visiting that part of the world, put a couple of nets and some plastic bags in your luggage – you never know!

Circumstances dictated that Chris Lyon and his wife, Irene, were not able to go before 9th November and Irene's son Steve who would share with me, made up the party. For a change we decided to stay near Ocho Rios on the north coast of the island rather than the usual destination of Negril which is on the west coast. It was a lovely hotel and we had very nice rooms, though the weather was not brilliant until the final week (we stayed for 3 weeks).

From a fish collecting point of view it was disappointing, I left the hotel several times to explore the area on foot; there seemed to be no possibility of hiring a bicycle this time. To the east along the main road towards Dunns River Falls and the town there are a few streams under the road, especially near Roaring River, but nothing accessible and no obvious fish life. To the west a walk of a mile or so brings you to the "Irish Rover" pub at Drax Hall and further on towards St Anne's Bay there are one or two water courses and ditches. I thought I saw fish in one of these, returned the next day with a net to find that they were shrimps! Also a healthy growth of what looked like *Elodea*

One Sunday I took a taxi to Shaw Park Botanical Gardens, on the site of an old hotel on high ground overlooking Ocho Rios Town; and well worth a visit. The mandatory guided tour ends at the gift souvenir shop and here the proprietor, Robert, suggested an unofficial tour taking you half a mile to a Jamaican village at the head of the stream. This sounded interesting and proved to be well worth the trek over the mud and stones. The villagers used parts of this stream for drinking water, also for washing (themselves and their clothes) The headwaters produced a few *Gambusia* species, also what appeared to be Green *Xiphophorus helleri* (it's a long way to go to catch these!) and an odd male Guppy (which made it home but died after a week). Presumably the Swordtails and Guppies had been

dumped in the river by someone at sometime and they had become naturalised. There is no evidence of an aquarium hobby in Jamaica, but I have never been to Kingston, the capital, where there may be. Quite a lot of fish were caught for me by two Jamaican boys (for US \$1 each) and I smuggled the catch back to my room in the hotel.



Having got a few fish, my next venture was to a location that Don Kenwood had told me about, where he and before him, Derek Lambert had in the past caught a few specimens of the elusive *Gambusia melapleura*. This was Shettlewood on the Great River which is actually south west of Montego Bay and up in the hills, so was quite a way from where I was staying. I negotiated a fare of US \$150 with a local taxi driver (I actually gave him \$160 – and he did not seem pleased). Leaving the hotel before lunch, we arrived at the Great River at 3pm after the

usual delays with the Montego Bay traffic. My driver missed the correct turning: Shettlewood is not one of the usual tourist destinations, but I explained that the English were all mad!

This was certainly the right spot, I took a few photos and Don confirmed it. I asked the driver to give me an hour and made my way carefully along an overgrown path to the rapid 100yards downstream from the road bridge. Despite going knee deep in the river there were a few fish to be seen but not to be caught. The uneven bottom of rocks and stones didn't help and made movement difficult. I must admit that over the years most of my fish have come from ditches, ponds and swamps. Don, for instance, is a better river fisherman than me and might possibly have had some success.



Near 4pm my time was up, it was obvious that I wasn't going to catch anything, and also there were rain clouds threatening, it would be dusk by 5pm and I had developed a rather nasty chest infection, possibly asthma related. Bitterly disappointed, I slowly dried myself and made my way back to the taxi and faced the long drive back to Ocho Rios. A few days earlier, on an organised trip from the hotel, I visited the YS Falls, Appleton Estate Rum Factory and the Black River with its (English speaking) crocodiles! Most Jamaican hotels do this tour; it's a good way of seeing the countryside, but a long day. At the Appleton Estate, I glanced at the ditches near the entrance and am satisfied that there are fish in there, about *Gambusia* size. This is near the town of Maggotty so probably linked to the Black River system.

Near the end of the day we drove along the coast road from Black River towards Ferris Cross and in the process crossed Bluefields Bay in the failing evening light. Here I noticed 3 or 4 places where small rivers flowed into the sea, one of which must have been the Bluefields River itself, but of course we couldn't stop. This area is potential *Gambusia melapleura* country and some days later I toyed with the idea of a day trip from Ocho Rios to Bluefields Bay, but the taxi fare would be at least US\$200 and the day (Saturday) that I wanted to go would, they would find it more profitable to do Airport runs to Montego Bay! By now we were running out of days, so I gave up on the idea, it would be a nice idea to explore the area sometime in the future. Don has been there some years ago but found it unfishable due to a recent tropical storm. Derek Lambert, however had more luck on his visit the same year.

The last day was Tuesday 30th November, we had to be out of our rooms by 11 a.m. and on to the Airport transfer coach by 12.45 p.m. Up early and at first light I caught up and bagged up my fish for the journey home, trying not to wake Steve too early. At Montego Bay the flight was a little late in from Gatwick so they kept us hanging around. When we did board, there was a further delay whilst they off-loaded 2 passengers- and their luggage - as they were "unfit to travel" (they had been drinking all day since the champagne breakfast). Eventually, eight hours into the flight, we heard to our horror that winter had come to the UK at least a month early, Gatwick had had snow and was closed and we were to be diverted to Birmingham. We landed 2 hours late (at 9.20 a.m.) in light snow showers but it was another 2 hours before we got our luggage. We could go on to Gatwick by company coach—heaven knows how long that would take—or make our own way home from Birmingham. In the end we took the latter option and took a (very expensive) taxi to Bishops Stortford. We were all very tired and Steve was, in particular, feeling the cold, and I didn't want any surviving fish carted up and down the country in freezing weather.

Back at Chris and Irene's home in Bishops Stortford, I delved into my suitcase to find that the fish had in fact survived the journey back to U.K. A couple of cups of tea later and I finished my journey home on the local buses – 18 miles via Stansted Airport, carrying my fish but not the rest of my luggage which could wait another day.



The Purple Platy from Mexico's Rio Soto la Marina System by Dr. Myron Gordon -(Geneticist, New York Aquarium)

Editors note: *This article was originally published in Tropical Fish Hobbyist Magazine. A young Howard Preston read it and decided then and there that he had to go to Mexico and look for Xiphophorus, this one article started him on a journey that took him to many different countries and profoundly affected the direction of his life.*

In Mexico along the Pan-American highway, halfway between Linares and Villagran, the road, conforming to the rising tableland, reaches a peak of just over 1,500 feet. These intervening highlands form a natural divide between the watershed of the Rio San Fernando to the north and that of the Rio Soto la Marina to the south. The northernmost tributaries of the Rio Soto la marina flow south-east from the eastern ridge of the Sierra Madre mountains to the Gulf of Mexico, emptying into the Gulf about 50 miles north of Tampico. We fished in the Rio Pilon and the Arroyo Meco but their waters were muddied by heavy rain back in the mountains. From the aquarist's point of view no brilliant new forms appeared, although from

the purely scientific viewpoint every fish represented a new item. Not for 50 years has this area been explored for the species natural to the region.

Stagnant River Pool

South of Hildago we reached one of the largest of the Top Soto la Marina's tributaries, a river which has the symbolic name of Rio Purificación. At the height of the dry season, when we happened to visit it, parts of the Rio of the holy name looked less than inspiring. A narrow ribbon of water trickled in and out of a narrow, tortuous channel within the enormous river bed, over 600 feet wide. Many of the tiny branches were dead ends forming pools between huge boulders. The stones, heated by the sun, speeded up the evaporation of the trapped water.

Around a sharp turn, the waters formed a slow swirling back-eddy of green water. As we approached the murky pond we disturbed a flock of vultures that were resting on the scraggly branches of a dead, leafless mesquite tree that overhung the banks of the river. The tracks of the unlovely birds covered the muddy edges of the stagnant river pool and from the pattern it appeared that the naked-necked scavengers had been feeding upon the dead fishes that bobbed up and floated on the surface or had drifted to the shore. The noon day heat blanketed the area; the Rio Purificación was dying and as foul as a cesspool.. With our fishing gear but without our customary enthusiasm we slipped down the slimy banks into the dirty water. We pulled our seine after us, hoping we might get those fishes that had survived the intolerable conditions. No one would have blamed us if we had passed up this filthy job. But then if we passed it up, how then would we have known what was in it? Our map showing Rio Purificación would have been a glaring blind spot constantly reminding us of our squeamishness.

In this instance we were rewarded, for we rediscovered a brilliant new platyfish, one that never before had been seen as a live aquarium fish. Only once before had it been taken; that was by Seth E. Meek of the Chicago Natural History Museum back in 1904. The remarkable platyfish from the Rio Purificación appeared at first glance to be an intermediate form between the typical platy and the typical Swordtail in one detail, because the males had a small sword-like extension to their tail fins. Otherwise its platyfish attributes were obvious

It occurred to me that perhaps the new sword-tailed platy might be a natural hybrid; for often many aquarium-bred male hybrids between the common platy and the common swordtail have tiny swords. Yet after fishing in the Rio Purificación and other tributaries of the Rio Soto la Marina for many days, we failed to find any swordtails, nor had anyone else reported them this far north



Platy With a Sword

So distinctive was the abbreviated sword of this new platy, and so constant was it in all mature males, that Dr Carl L. Hubbs and I decided to bestow upon this fish a new specific name: *xiphidium*, meaning "with a sword". Upon further study, later, it proved to be one of the intermediate links between the old genus *Platypoecilus* and *Xiphophorus*. As a consequence, the discovery of the new platyfish was in part responsible for the elimination of *Platypoecilus* as a generic name and for its union with *Xiphophorus*.

Because we found the new platy during the bad season in the life of the Rio Purificación we obtained only a few specimens and they were in poor condition. It seemed like a miracle that they had survived in that suffocating eddy of water. Later, near the village of La Cruz, we found a clear run of the great river and it was a pleasure to explore it. We searched about and found a small, clear spring pool oozing out of the western bank. The pool contained a miniature jungle of water weeds and was directly in the bed of the Rio Purification. In between the entangling plant filaments we found several hundred platys, sturdy and shiny like fresh coins from the mint. It is remarkable that the platys in these thickly populated spring pools survive and become re-established in so exposed an area, for during every rainy season the entire river valley is swept over by torrential floods. Often in their violent rush downstream the waters change the contours of the valley by scouring its bed and widening its banks. Yet the platyfish of these spring pools directly within the river bed persist in their weedy niches year after year.

In the early morning Hours after we had caught a fine group of new purple platyfish, we placed them in shipping cans and had them travelling northward from La Cruz on the noon train. They Arrived at our laboratory in excellent condition. When they were transferred to aquaria they bred and provided many young; they turned out to be a hardy aquarium species. Within a few years, a shipment of our new spike tailed platy was made to Europe from the United States. It was gratifying to be able to send this platy to the Old World aquarists who, in previous years had sent so many fine species to this country. Scientific papers written by Herr professor Curt Kosswig, then of Braunschweig, Germany. Later of Istanbul, Turkey, and who is now back in Hamburg, described the heredity of this species. We too have been working with them and we hope to extend the knowledge of genetics of the *xiphidium* beyond what has already been published about them.

Local Races of Platys

In 1939 we discovered another hidden metropolis of the purple platy in a spring pool near Hacienda Santa Engracia, not far from Ciudad Victoria. At that time my wife, Evelyn and I found a tiny stream that flowed into the great Rio Santa Engracia. It contained a few purple platys, so I decided to trace the brook to its source. A quarter of a mile up a gentle slope we found its fountain head in a 6 feet plant filled spring pool. The

purple platys were hiding in an almost solid mass of water weeds and it was hard work getting them out but we dug and fished out more than 200 platys. From this stock, and the few we took alive in 1939, we have maintained them to this day by brother-sister inbreeding for 16 years.

The ability of a platyfish population to "stay put" in their chosen natural niche despite yearly droughts and floods may account for the building up (through a process of inbreeding) the distinctive features of local races. For instance, in the northern tributaries of the Rio Soto la Marina very few of the purple platys were spotted, certainly not more than 1 percent; the populations in the south contained many more spotted members, about 60 percent; the same platyfish species in the southernmost tributaries were nearly all spotted.

With these statistics in mind, if I were given a single *xiphidium* I could not tell from which tributary of the Rio Soto la Marina system it had come from. But if I were given about 50 platys all from the same pool, I could tell with some degree of accuracy where they came from. I could do this by counting the number of spotted members. If they represented only about 1 percent. They had to come from the Rio Purificación; if about 60 percent were spotted; then they must have been from the Rio Santa Engracia; if nearly all were spotted, they were from the Rio San Marcos at Ciudad Victoria.

This points to an interesting fact about how groups of related fish live in nature. Each community of a species becomes a distinct population that differs from its neighbouring colony not necessarily by having certain unique features but by having a certain frequency of similar traits. In populations of primitive man and civilised people living in isolated groups, anthropologists find a similar state of affairs. This is because local peoples and local fishes are more likely to marry their own close relatives; as a consequence of some degree of inbreeding, local populations take on distinctive traits.

A Connoisseurs Fish

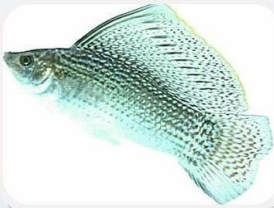
The mature male *xiphidium* platy is a strikingly coloured fish. Its remarkable colouring does not depend upon its brilliance of yellows or reds that are characteristic of some other species of platyfish but upon its deep purple which is almost black in intensity. No other platy has the colour. The purple

platy is a natural because its colour is typical of the wild fish, that is, it was produced in its native habitat, not in the aquarium. The purple platy is a peaceable fish when kept in good condition, fed on a variety of of fresh and prepared fish foods, and when given adequate living space. It is not too aggressive towards other species or its young.

Why is the platy that is born to the purple not more available to the public? The purple platy, like many other new species of fishes and varieties of old species, like the wagtail for example, has been distributed freely by the New York Aquarium to commercial breeders of tropical aquarium fishes so they would be available to all. The breeders have turned the purple platy down. Why? Because they say th purple platy does not have the flashy colouring of other platys. They claim that the xiphidium would not stand up in public demand and sales against the bright red-and-yellow *variatus* and many coloured *maculatus*. For these reasons they do not want to risk their investments in time, labour and hatchery space.

Nobody can blame the commercial breeders for refusing to invest in a new fish, regardless of how exotic it is, which in their estimation, will yield them no return. This makes the situation of the tropical fish hobby today quite strange. Some of us may remember not many years back when a new aquarium fish became available it was eagerly sought after as a collectors item I wonder, where are the present day fish connoisseurs

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