

Livebearer News

Official Members Magazine of the
BRITISH LIVEBEARER ASSOCIATION



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Data Protection Act

In order to comply with the requirements of the Data Protection Act, we need to inform members that their name, address, email address and telephone number are being maintained on a database, the purpose of which is for the distribution of the Association's magazine and to inform members of forthcoming events. This information will not be provided to any other organisation for any purpose whatsoever without prior consultation. The association agrees to remove any details at a member's request.

Committee

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EDITORIAL

First of all I would like to say welcome to the new members who have recently joined us in the BLA – hope to see you at some of the BLA events this year – see the “Diary Dates” section.

Does anyone else print off their copies of “Livebearer News”? I do because I'm old fashioned and I like to have an object, not just a document in a computer memory, to save. In order to print off a copy which makes sense I have to “paginate” the document, which means that I have to change the order of the pages so that they come out in the correct order when I print the pages back to back. If anyone would like a copy of the paginated version emailing to them so that they can print it off themselves, just let me know at the email address on Page 2.

Please – If you change your email address, will you please let me know the new one. The last few times that I have sent out the “News” by email I have received notification that emails hav3 not been delivered, presumably because people had changed their address, leaving me with no way to get in touch with them. I am sure that we have lost a few members recently because of this.

The **Leicester auction** was a success. It was good to meet up with those BLA members who made it there and to hear from Nigel about his latest trip to Mexico. There were a number of species in the auction that I had never seen before. Prices were generally reasonable apart from a pair of *Characodon lateralis* that I fancied going for over £30 !

DIARY DATES

July 9th 2017 :- The Southern Livebearer Aquatic Group section of the BLA are holding a show and auction at the Kempshott Village Hall, Basingstoke, Hampshire. The doors open at 10.00 am. There will be talks given by leading aquarists.

August 13th, 2017 :- The BLA are holding an auction in Stoke-on-Trent. This is an open auction for both livebearers and non-livebearers. There will also be talks given by leading aquarists, including our own Chairman, Paddy Davies, talking about livebearers in Jamaica. The address is :- [Tollgate Hotel & Leisure](#); Ripon Rd, Blurton Stoke-on-Trent Staffs ST3 3BS 01782 313302

There are refreshments available in the hotel and Twin rooms available at £70 for those that wish to stay.

7th & 8th October 2017, we will be holding our Autumn Convention at the Holiday Inn Express, Rockingham Rd, Kettering. The Fancy Guppy UK group will also be holding their show at this event. At last year's event a few pairs of fancy guppies fetched very high prices but many other pairs that looked equally good to my untrained eye went for just £3. All three events offer the chance to get some very rare and unusual livebearers into your tanks or for you to sell your surplus stock for better prices than any aquatic store will give you.

Derek Lambert – Master breeder and Steve Oliver – Species Control Officer

Talking to Alan Rothwell on the way to the Leicester auction, he mentioned that he had the list of species bred by Derek Lambert and for which the American Livebearer Association awarded Derek their “Viviparous Expert” breeder award. When I said that I would like to see it, Alan promised to post it and I have included it below. I have never even seen about half of the species on the list. I would bet that many of them are not even maintained in Britain any more. Certainly many of these species are very rare or extinct in the wild and we as aquarists can play an important part in the conservation of these species – but it would help if the BLA knew which ones were being kept. Steve Oliver has volunteered to act as Species Control Officer for the BLA and I have included a letter from him after Derek's list.

Derek's List :-

1. Skiffia lermæ;
2. Ataeniobius toweri;
3. Gambusia melapleura;
4. Poecilia chica;
5. Priapella compressa;
6. Allotoca dugesi;
7. Xiphophorus multilineatus;
8. Poecilia caucana;
9. Skiffia francesae;
10. Phallichthys quadripunctatus;
11. Brachyrhaphis roseni;
12. Characodon audax;
13. Characodon lateralis;
14. Poecilia picta;
15. Priapella intermedia;
16. Xiphophorus helleri;
17. Poecilia butleri;
18. Xenotoca variata;
19. Girardinus metallicus;
20. Poecilia reticulata;
21. Scolichthys greenwayi;
22. Xiphophorus milleri;
23. Gambusia xanthosoma;
24. G. marshi;
25. Zoogoneticus quiteonsis;
26. Alfaró cultratus;
27. A. huberi;
28. Allotoca diazi;
29. Ameca splendens;
30. Brachyrhaphis hartwegi;
31. Cnesterodon carnegi;
- 32.

Dermogenys montanus; 33. D. viviparous; 34. Flexipennis vittata; 35. Gambusia alvarezi; 36. G. Hispaniola; 37. G. hurtadoi; 38. G. longispinnis; 39. G. regani; 40. Girardinichthys multiradiatus; 41. Heterophallus milleri; 42. Ilyodon ameca; 43. Jenysia lineata; 44. Limia caymanensis; 45. Poecilia melanogaster; 46. Limia zonata; 47. Neoheterandria elegans; 48. N. tridentiger; 49. Nomorhamphus liemi liemi; 50. Phallichthys amates amates; 51. Poecilia elegans; 52. Poeciliopsis prolifica; 53. P. infans; 54. P. terraburensis; 55. Priapella olmecae; 56. Quintana atrizona; 57. Neotoca bilineata; 58. Skiffia multipunctata; 59. Xiphophorus cortezi; 60. X. couchianus; 61. X. evelynae; 62. X. pygmaeus; 63. X. maculatus; 64. X. variatus; 65. X. xiphidium; 66. Hubbsina turneri; 67. Allodontichthys zonistus; 68. A. tamazulae; 69. Gambusia affinis; 70. G. oligosticta; 71. G. puncticulata; 72. G. sexradiata; 73. Girardinichthys viviparous; 74. Girardinus falcatus; 75. G. creolus; 76. G. microdactylus; 77. Phallichthys tico; 78. P. fairweatheri; 79. Poecilia Mexicana; 80. Xiphophorus birchmanni; 81. X. gordonii; 82. X. malinche; 83. X. meyeri; 84. X. montezumae; 85. X. nezahualcoyotli; 86. X. clemenciae; 87. Carlhubbsia stewarti; 88. Zoogoneticus sp "Crescent"; 89. Gambusia wrayi; 90. Brachyrhaphis holdridgei; 91. Belonesox belizanus; 92. Poecilia sphenops; 93. Xenophallus umbratilis; 94. Poeciliopsis hnlickae; 95. Heterandria Formosa; 96. Xiphophorus nigrensis; 98. Xenotoca eiseni; 99. Poecilia vittata; 100. P. nigrofasciata; 101. Brachyrhaphis rhabdophora; 102. Girardinus denticulatus; 103. Cnesterodon decemmaculatus; 104. Poeciliopsis gracilis; 105. P. catameco; 106. Poecilia

heterandria; 107. Heterophallus rachowi; 108. Xiphophorus andersi; 109. X. signum; 110. Phalloptychus januaris; 111. Gambusia panuco; 112. Chapalichthys encaustus; 113. Allotoca sp "Tarascan bumblebee".

Altogether there are 83 Poecilids, 26 Goodeids, 3 halfbeaks and 1 Jenysiid on the list – pretty impressive! It is not surprising that at the time, Derek was one of only two people to have been awarded the ALA Expert Breeder Award.

Letter from Steve Oliver :-

I would like to introduce myself to those who don't yet know me, my name is Steven Oliver and I am a member of the BLA committee.

The BLA and its' membership have always been at the forefront of species preservation. The main part of our drive is to keep and maintain cultivated and wild species of livebearer.

The problem we face as an association is that we are unaware of the species that our membership maintain. Currently no records are being kept, this makes it virtually impossible to co-ordinate species maintenance and welfare as it becomes the problem of the individual keeper where as with association the chances of species survival or maintenance are stronger.

There are obviously many different species that come under the livebearer umbrella and along with the different types, different variations and locations. The wild species is where I

believe the most benefit will be gained from accurate species maintenance records, these will certainly include some of the more unfortunate ones which are now extinct or facing extinction in the wild.

I, for my part, have been asked to look after Species Maintenance. This is a role with which I have no experience up to now, so I am researching and feeling my way into it. I have set up some spreadsheets to record the data but without up to date information they are inaccurate at best. This is why I will need your help, the more of you that contact me with your information the more accurate the records become, all contact and information received will be confidential. I would like if possible a list of the current species (both wild and cultivated) being maintained by you the members to include any relevant information such as type/location/collection etc...

These databases are hopefully going to need constantly updating so please drop me an email if you obtain a new species or location or conversely are unfortunate to lose a species.

You can contact me by email steven.oliver63@yahoo.co.uk or I shall be at the next Auction in Leicester and will be happy to receive your species list and for those who have already given me their species lists I will be happy to receive an update of your purchases.

Regards Steve Oliver

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The article below was written by Derek Lambert and first appeared in "Practical Fishkeeping" magazine. A copy of the article was recently given by Derek's mother, Pat, to BLA member Alan Rothwell, with her kind permission to use it for an edition of "Livebearer News". Many thanks Pat.

Poecilia sulphuraria Alvaraz, 1948

In 1948 a Mexican scientist, Dr J. Alvarez, described a new species of molly which was only known from one location. This is Baños del Azufre in the state of Tabasco, Mexico. Despite careful examination of the surrounding springs and river systems, this fish has still only been found at the springs themselves and for a few miles downstream. For this reason it has been declared as of "Special Concern" by the American Fisheries Society. This does not mean it is in decline in the wild, only that it is in a very limited habitat which could result in its extinction should anything happen to damage it.

The genuine Sulphur Molly. Over the years many mis-identified fish have circulated in the hobby as Sulphur mollies. After all, this is the rarest and most desirable molly and there are very few genuine photographs of it in print. This leaves the field wide open for other fish to be fobbed off as this species. The first genuine collection of the Sulphur molly to reach European fishkeepers were those brought back by Dr Radda in 1979. Since then they have been re-collected on many occasions and every time they have died out very quickly. Despite this continuous failure over many years, several books written by Europeans include data on the best conditions to keep and breed the fish.

My own experience with this species started in about 1990 when Manfred Meyer sent me two females. Along with the fish

came the advice to use certain chemicals in the water as a prophylactic treatment. Apparently the fish have a very limited immune system due to the lack of parasites in their native habitat.

Before putting any chemicals in the water I phoned one of the world's authorities on mollies for advice. Dr Joanne Norton suggested that the fish would be far better off without the chemicals, and that I would need to very slowly acclimatise them to fresh water over a period of months rather than weeks. Following Joanne's advice I placed the two fish in a 12" x 8" tank in all the water they had. Over the next few months small amounts of fresh water were added to the tank until it was full and then gradually regular partial water changes were instigated.

Diet The next problem was diet. In the wild they are said to feed on a silver thread-like algae. However, this species is unique among the Poeciliids in having a forked organ of taste on the lower jaw. Exactly why this organ would have evolved if the fish were feeding on what is supposed to be a common plant form is a mystery. Generally, specialised sensory organs like this evolve to help an animal overcome a specific problem such as finding or identifying food.

Because I was somewhat sceptical about the available dietary information I tried feeding a wide range of foods to my own fish. These seemed far more interested in the baby brine shrimp and flake food rather than vegetable matter. In the end I stopped feeding any supplementary vegetable matter at all and the fish thrived.

Despite living about a year in captivity, however, my two females never produced young.

Sulphur molly hunt After the demise of these two fish, I

went on the hunt to try to find some more Sulphur mollies. Apart from a false start with some *Limia sulphurophila* which were being passed around as Sulphur mollies none could be found. Luckily in 1993 the "Aquarian" Endangered Species Survey took me to the location for this species and I was able to bring back 10 youngsters about 7 – 8mm long with which to try to establish a captive-breeding colony.

I collected plenty of water with the fish. This water was clear at the time of collection registering a pH of 6 but it became milky white after a few hours with a pH of 8.4. The water cleared again during the week the fish were on the road, but the pH remained high. At the location the stench of sulphur was very strong and the water effervesced with toxic gases. This smell could still be detected a month after the fish had arrived in England despite the original water's dilution with fresh water.

Tank care Upon my return the fish were placed in a 12" x 8" tank with all their own water. The tank had been sterilised with a strong disinfectant before my departure and had been left dry for my two weeks absence.

Over the next few months, fresh water drawn from the tap and allowed to stand overnight, was added to the original water. Once the small tank was full, the fish and water were transferred to an 18" x 10" tank and the topping-up process continued. Once this tank was full I started doing 10% water changes weekly and gradually increased this to 50% weekly. My tap water is very hard and alkaline with a pH running at about 7.8 to 8.2. The temperature was maintained at 24°C (76°F). Once the fish were settled into the larger tank some plant cover was provided.

The youngsters grew well and started to sex out when they reached a size of 3cm.

It was at this stage that the beautiful adult colouration really started to show, though one young fish exhibited black spots from a very small size. This has developed into the dominant male and is one of the very rare black speckled specimens which occur in the wild. Even before the gonopodium on this male was fully formed he was courting the females and trying to mate.

Once again live and flake foods were preferred to vegetable matter and unlike many mollies, I never observed them picking away at algae in their tank.

Why breed the Sulphur molly? Captive breeding success with this species is very important for several reasons. **First** as they occur in only one habitat they are vulnerable to extinction. A captive colony would allow re-introduction if something disastrous happened to kill all the native fish. **Second**, they are beautiful fish which deserve a place in any specialist livebearer enthusiasts' tanks. **Finally** they have tremendous potential as a commercial fish, being of small size, attractive colouration and peaceful temperament. Hopefully, they will now become established in the hobby and start to fulfil some of this potential.

Breeding problems About 8 months after capture the first brood was born. These fry were about 5mm long at birth and were dead. Part of the problem seemed to be the adults attacking the new born fry.

Since then gravid females have been removed to small tanks with plenty of plants to give protection. Birth mortality rates still remain high but the fish are young and this can be a problem with many young molly females.

The average brood size has been six fry of about 5mm in length. This may seem a very small number but remember the females are only 3.5cm long and the fry are very large in comparison.

What does it look like? As mollies go, this is one of the smallest-known species, attaining a length of only 3cm for the male and 3.5 cm for the female. It has a wide blunt mouth and body shape reminiscent of *Poecilia chica*.

The colouration is very distinctive, even on young, immature fish. The body colour is silvery blue with a number of dark vertical bands running along the upper half of the flanks. These are more or less noticeable depending on the fish's mood.

The fins are grey with black speckles; however, mature males exhibit a pale yellow to orange blush in the dorsal and caudal fins when courting. Gravid females have the most gorgeous patch on the abdomen which corresponds to the gravid spot of most other Poeciliids.

A very rare black speckled form is known to occur.



Thanks again to Pat Lambert for giving permission for this article and photo to be re-printed.

Report on the GWG survey trip to Jalisco, Mexico, March 2016. Part 2

Thursday 3rd March

The days started to fall into a pattern. The cockerel in a neighbouring garden woke me at first light (about 5.30 am) and I got up soon after 6.00 am. I took camera and binoculars down to the lake (the Presa de la Vega) and spent some time bird-watching and then met the rest of the team in time for breakfast in the main square of Teuchitlán at about 9.00am. By this time it was already getting warm, with blue skies and unbroken sunshine. Breakfast was a very relaxed affair, though I found it difficult to get used to spicy food with re-fried beans so early in the day. I'm afraid I can't recommend the coffee there –weak Nescafé boiled for hours with cinnamon sticks! Not to my taste so I stuck to fresh orange juice – prepared whilst we waited. Very often Michael would disappear off to use the internet and try to sort out the permit to bring fishes out of the country [more on this later].

In the late morning we set off westwards in the minibus to the former habitats of *Allodontichthys polylepis*, starting with the Rio or Arroyo Dávalos near Guachinago. *A. polylepis* had not been seen in this stream for at least 14 years, including a few years earlier when the American members of the GWG had visited. When we arrived I thought I could see why. The area

is semi-desert and the stream was reduced to a trickle, though we could see that it became a torrent in the rainy season. We had to scramble down a steep banking with nets, buckets etc to reach the river and quickly found that there was definitely life present in the water – a large leach!



The warm and barely-flowing
Arroyo Dávalos

The leach

The nets were quickly put into use and we found fish – *Ilyodon furcidens*. The electrofishing gear was then also used and soon a superb male *A. polylepis*, in really good condition and showing lovely colours, was caught. However, he was the only one we found and so he was released back into the stream.

After that, we moved on to the Rio de las Bolas which was very close and which connects further downstream with the Arroyo Dávalos. *A. polylepis* and *I. furcidens* were found there, too, but also many tilapia.



Michael with the male *A. polylepis*



The Rio de las Bolas

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Ilyodon furcidens caught in the Rio de las Bolas.

The last location of the day was the Rio Potrero Grande, the type location for *A. polylepis*, but here we found only one gravid female *I. furcidens* and many Cyprinids.

Friday 4th March

“There’s time – and then there’s Mexican time”. A quote from Nigel which became the motto for a large part of the trip. For various reasons we didn’t leave Teuchitlán until midday and so had only half a day for the journey to the Etzatlán basin. We went first to the Palo Verde lagoon to look for *Allotoca maculate*. When we got there we couldn’t see the lake; or rather, we could not see open water as it was almost completely covered with *Eichhornia* plants. Fernando and Isai made a valiant attempt to force their way out into open water but were eventually defeated. [See below]

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On the other side of the main road from the lagoon we found an artificial pond which is connected to the main lagoon during the rainy season by a channel. Unfortunately I was too slow to get a photo of the snake in this channel. In the pond we found good stocks of *Goodea atripinnis*, *Xenotoca melanosoma*, *Poeciliopsis infans* and also many tilapia and *Pseudoxiphophorus bimaculatus*.



The pond near the Palo Verde lagoon. Caught in the pond shown above.

From here we travelled to the Hacienda San Sebastian, and after a short time received permission to collect in the El Tanque spring pool. The stream where we tried first looked hopelessly polluted but still contained fish. The pool contained good numbers of *Xenotoca melanosoma* and *Xenotoca sp San Marcos*.



The polluted-looking stream. A *Xenotoca* female.



The main pool with some of the team and the hacienda in the background. To be continued.

BLA AUTUMN

AUCTION

& SHOW

7th & 8th October 2017

Holiday Inn Express, Rockingham Rd, Kettering

The Auction will be held on Sunday, further details on timings, hotel bookings, etc. will be released soon.



This get-together will be held in conjunction with FGUK show & Convention