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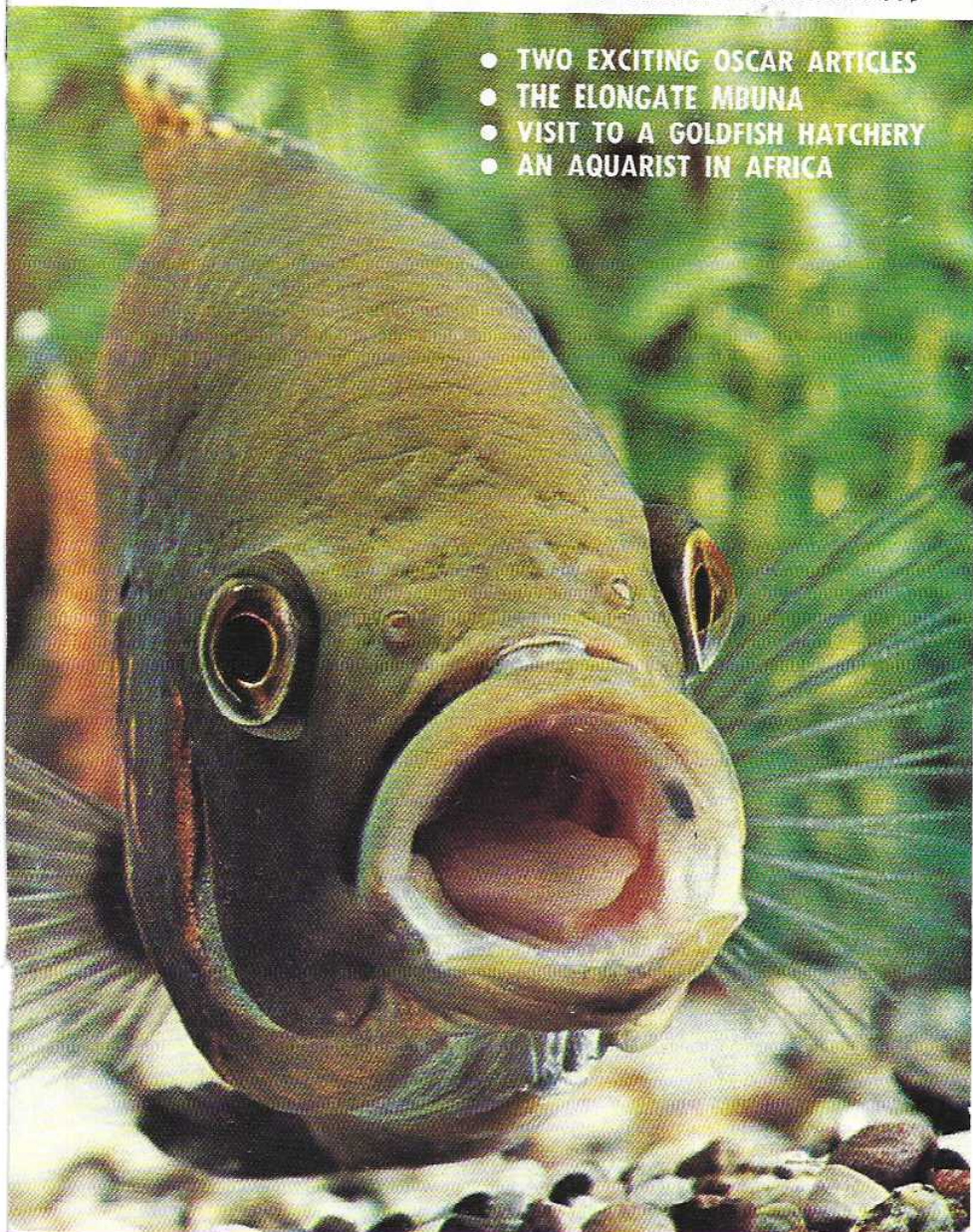
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AQUARIUM

British Isles 4/2 DOMESTIC 50¢

- TWO EXCITING OSCAR ARTICLES
- THE ELONGATE MBUNA
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- AN AQUARIST IN AFRICA



How To Write A TROPICAL FISH COLUMN

By HENRY NUWER

DO YOU LIVE IN AN AREA which publishes one of the thousands of weekly newspapers sold across the country? The chances are that you do, and a quick trip to the local news-stand, or a glance in the phone directory should disclose the names of a surprising number of papers published near your home.

I have been a reader of these "little" publications for some time. The material carried in these local newspapers may seem trivial to the casual reader, but closer inspection often discloses many worthwhile articles, and to one who can find humor and interest in the everyday world, these papers prove to be quite compelling reading.

At any rate, I had observed that not only did these local papers print articles of interest to sundry groups, but the "Big City" dailies also devoted precious space to columns dealing with lesser-known subjects for their readers as well. Hobbies have always commanded the attention of leading newspaper editors. Stamp collecting, coin collecting, gardening, sewing, and antique collecting are some of the syndicated columns found in our daily paper which cater to the growing market of leisure time interests. As far as I have been able to learn, however, there has never been a column on the tropical fish hobby.

Therefore, summing up my courage one lunch hour, I strode into the office of the *Putnam County Courier* in Carmel, New York (located 50 miles north of the Bronx), to inquire into the possibility of writing a tropical fish column each week. The *Courier* already published hobby columns on record collecting and antiques, so I had high hopes when I first approached the editor, Tom Hartley. My confidence quickly vanished, however, when I had to actually explain my idea; but summoning up hidden reserves of adrenaline, I blurted out what I had in mind.

I told him of the immense popularity the tropical fish hobby commands, and proved it with statistics which I had garnered from the public library. As a teacher in the local high school, I told him of the interest my students had expressed in collecting fish. Then I mentioned the financial possibilities of such an article, hoping that local pet store owners would advertise in the paper as a result of my column.

Well, Mr. Hartley proved to be quite receptive to such a column,



Editor Tom Hartley (seated), checking "Tropical Talk" with the author, Hank Nuwer.

later I had the satisfaction of buying the *Courier*, and finding my column included.

How can other aquarists start a similar column? Well, the first step is to study the format of your local newspaper. It is essential that a potential writer grasp the reading level and interests of the audience you are trying to interest.

Then it becomes necessary to do some research work to supply the editor of the paper with facts and statistics to persuade him that a tropical fish column would be an asset to his paper. Another good idea is to have several sample articles written in advance so the editor can also examine your writing ability. However, the potential author must not count on a fat paycheck each week! Most small newspapers run on a limited budget, and can afford to pay little or nothing. Rewards will be forthcoming, but unfortunately money doesn't appear to be one of them.

Your first payment consists in the satisfaction you will receive from seeing your column in print. The second benefit comes from the unlimited possibilities of coming into contact with people who share your interest in collecting tropical fish. There is a good possibility that an Aquarium Society will be started in the Carmel area with the "Tropical Talk" column as the focal point to begin such a club, and report on club news.

To strengthen the popularity of your column, and to provide a source of future information, it is a good idea to form alliances with one or more local pet stores. These pet stores are only too willing to offer "Specials" to readers of the paper who bring in a copy of the column.

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What does the writer do when he receives a question that stumps him? Well, rather than throwing up his pen in despair, it is quite easy to obtain professional advice from many willing sources. When your own knowledge and experience is lacking in some area, local pet store owners and periodicals and books on tropical fish will answer your questions. (Always remember to credit your source, and make sure the publication allows you to quote it. Otherwise editor permission must be secured.)

I have also received valuable information from larger companies which deal with tropical fish. Using the addresses I had copied out of THE AQUARIUM advertisements, I mailed many requests out to these manufacturers requesting information on specific problems as well as individual products. I was quite overwhelmed by the willingness of these companies to help me. In fact, several mailed me samples of their products to use and report on. So far, this is the only material payment I have received for writing such a column.

Recently I have mailed out copies of my column to other small papers, hoping to syndicate it across the country. However, even if I only am able to keep writing for the *Courier*, the satisfaction of writing and opportunities for increasing my knowledge of the tropical fish hobby have made this venture a worthwhile task. ●

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