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Betta

Natural Habitat

Betta fish are originally from Thailand and Malaysia and are tropical in nature. Males have longer, showy fins, and egg tubes may be seen on females. When well cared for, Bettas will reach a maximum length of 6 to 7 cm and can live to 5 years of age.

Housing

- A small aquarium (1 gallon) is an ideal enclosure for most Bettas. Betta bowls, which tend to be smaller, are much more susceptible to rapid temperature changes and can accumulate wastes quickly. If you choose to keep your Betta in a bowl, you need to pay close attention to water quality. The recommended bowl size is half-gallon.
 - For a pint-sized tank (or smaller), one-third of the water should be changed every day, and 100% of the water should be changed once a week.
 - For quart-sized tanks, change one-third of the water every 3 days and 100% of the water once a week.
 - For a half-gallon container or larger, change 100% of the water once a week unless you are using a filter.
- It is best to remove water from the bottom of the tank because that is where wastes accumulate. It is easy to siphon out this water using a turkey baster. New water should be dechlorinated before your Betta is placed in the tank. You may purchase bottled, dechlorinated water or buy a dechlorinator for use in tap water. Aging tap water will remove chlorine but not chloramines. Water should be the same temperature as the water in the tank to avoid thermal shock.
- Betta fish do not require filtered tanks or bubblers for additional oxygenation. They have a "breathing" organ on their head called a labyrinth that allows them to take in oxygen from the surface of the water. They also breathe through their gills like other fish. If you have a filter, it should be slowly rotating, or you should provide enough tank space that your Betta has a place to hide from the current. Your Betta eventually will adjust to the current, and you may even catch it playing in the current.

Temperature

Betta fish are tropical fish and thrive in warmer temperatures. They evolved in rice paddies, where temperatures were 80° to 85°, and the currents were very slow. Most Betta keepers in the United States aim to keep their tanks at 76° to 78°. Although Betta can survive at cooler temperatures, they become much more susceptible to disease.

Information cited from:

Mayer, J and Donnelly, T., eds. Clinical Veterinary Advisor: Birds and Exotic Pets. Elsevier, Philadelphia, PA. 2013. ISBN: 9781-4160-3969-3

Diet

Bettas are carnivorous fish that typically eat brine shrimp, black worms, mosquito larvae, and daphnia. It is difficult or undesirable for some owners to maintain live food sources, so alternative substitutes were developed. The second best sources of food are freeze-dried sources of meat (brine shrimp, worms, etc.). Dry foods (sold in pet stores) may also be used but are considered less nutritious. Adult Bettas should be fed once a day. Try to offer an amount that your Betta will eat within a few minutes. Do not leave uneaten food in the tank; remove whatever food your Betta does not eat within a few minutes. Do NOT overfeed!

Behavior

Betta fish are very friendly fish that get along well with other slowly moving fish. However, the males are very aggressive and should never be placed together because they will fight. Fast-moving fish such as zebra fish (danios) are not good tankmates for Bettas because they tend to harass the slower-moving Bettas. Goldfish are poor companions because they prefer cooler temperatures and tend to produce copious amounts of waste. Tetras are excellent tankmates and come in a wide variety of colors.

Lifespan

Bettas can live to be older than 5 years of age.

Common Medical Conditions

- Ideally, we want to prevent disease. Good water quality, appropriate temperature regulation, and good nutrition are important components for maintaining healthy fish. You may choose a water additive such as Aquari-Sol to prevent fungal infection. Signs of illness in your Betta may include difficulty swimming, changes in texture of the fins, swollen eyes, white patches on the scales or fins, not eating, a swollen belly, and/or a string of feces adhered to the fish. A list of some Betta diseases is provided below:
 - *Fin rot*. Due to poor water quality and accumulation of wastes. Fins appear ragged, frayed. Treatment requires antibiotics in the water.
 - *Swim bladder disease*. Result of fighting injury or overeating. Unable to maintain balance. Decrease feeding and monitor for several days.
 - *Pop eye*. Fungal or bacterial infection of the eye. White ring around the eye or bulging of the eyes. Treatment requires antibiotics and/or antifungals in the water.
 - *Slime disease*. Protozoan parasites cover fish. Dull mucous layer covers fish, gill damage. Treat with malachite green.
 - *Constipation*. Result of inappropriate diet. Swollen belly, string of feces, anorexia. Fasting and supplementing with fiber (e.g., lettuce).
 - *Dropsy*. Viral infection acquired secondary to poor nutrition. Pine cone appearance (scales stick up). Antibiotics, supportive care, often fatal disease.
 - *Ich*. Fungal infection. White spots on scales or fins. Antifungals, malachite green, copper sulfate.

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