

## Checklist

Before purchase make sure that:

- 1 You have the appropriate equipment and position for the aquarium.
- 2 You have researched all the species you are interested in and your final choices are all compatible.
- 3 You are familiar with how to transport and release your fish.
- 4 You are aware of the daily, weekly and monthly maintenance your aquarium will require.
- 5 You are prepared to look after your fish properly for the duration of their life.

## Equipment

- 1 Glass or plastic aquarium
- 2 Gravel cleaner
- 3 Water testing kit
- 4 Tap water conditioner
- 5 Gravel
- 6 Filter
- 7 Food
- 8 Heater and thermometer

Before purchase make sure:

- 1 You are aware of the temperament of these fish & know how to maintain the aquarium without risking injury.
- 2 Water parameters are as advised in this leaflet.
- 3 Your aquarium is suitable to house your chosen fish for its entire life or you are willing to upgrade according to the needs of the fish.



### Never release your aquarium animals or plants into the wild

Never release an animal or plant bought for a home aquarium into the wild. It is illegal and for most fish species this will lead to an untimely and possibly lingering death because they are not native to this country. Any animals or plants that do survive might be harmful to the environment.

### Important things to remember

#### Always buy...

test kits and regularly check the water for ammonia, nitrite, nitrate and pH. This will allow you to make sure the water in your aquarium is not causing welfare problems for your fish.

#### Establish a routine...

for testing the water in your aquarium. Record your results to enable you to highlight fluctuations quickly. Also check the temperature of the water.

#### Maintain...

the water in the aquarium within the accepted parameters highlighted in this leaflet. You may need to do regular water changes to achieve this.

#### Always wash your hands...

making sure to rinse off all soap residues, before putting them into your aquarium. Wash your hands again afterwards and certainly before eating, drinking or smoking.

#### Never siphon by mouth...

A fish tank can harbour bacteria which can be harmful if swallowed. Buy a specially designed aquarium gravel cleaner which can be started without the need to place the siphon in your mouth.



Scan this code to download an electronic copy

If in doubt contact your OATA retail member for further information



Ornamental Aquatic Trade Association Ltd  
*The voice of the ornamental fish industry*

0870 043 4013 info@ornamentalfish.org www.ornamentalfish.org



How to care for...



## Aggressive species

32 Tropical freshwater fish



# Introduction

This group of fish includes the piranhas, snakeheads, wolf fish and other predatory fish. They originate from many parts of the world including Africa and the Americas.

Aggressive species require careful handling, however they can reward you with some fascinating behavioural traits not shown in other peaceful community species.

# Water requirements

Like all fish, these species also require good water quality to thrive. The parameters below are a guide only as these fish can be acclimatised to different water over time:

**Temperature:** 22 to 27°C

**pH:** 6.5 to 8.5

**Ammonia:** 0mg/l (0.02mg/l may be tolerated for short periods)

**Nitrite:** 0mg/l (0.2mg/l may be tolerated for short periods)

**Hardness:** Moderately soft to hard (5 to 20°dH)

# Biology

These fish are known for their predatory behaviour and usually have to be kept by themselves or in species tanks. Some also exhibit inter-species aggression and need to be kept as single species e.g. the wolf fish.

These fish all grow large. The snakeheads can reach more than 30cm in length, adult piranhas may also exceed 30cm (although not often found in aquarium specimens) and wolf fish up to 45cm. Other aggressive predatory species are often available, so check with your retailer about the size of your chosen species.

Some of these fish have teeth which can inflict severe injuries. The snakeheads are known as surge hunters. This means they will grab prey quickly and eat it whole. The piranhas will devour all sized foods using their strong jaws and meat can be stripped to the bone quickly.

Piranhas have been known to live in captivity for 10 to 15 years. All of these fish can live for many years in the home aquarium in good water quality and without ailments.

The Northern snakehead (*Channa argus*) is listed on ILFA (Import of Live Fish Act) and the keeper needs a licence to be able to keep these fish because they can become invasive.

# Aquarium requirements

The majority of the aggressive species available for home aquariums get very large. If a smaller aquarium is bought to begin with, be aware that an upgrade may be required. A group of Piranhas (5 or 6) might best be provided with a minimum tank of 400 litres when adult. Be aware of the maximum size your chosen species will reach, if unsure check with your OATA retailer.

If you are keeping a wolf fish, the tank will need to have a large base. These fish do not swim through the water column but require large flat swimming spaces near the substrate. Snakeheads are notorious escape artists and are able to breathe out of the water and therefore a secure lid is essential. They breathe at the surface of the tank, therefore there should be a gap between the water and the hood.

Although aggressive, many of these fish are predators which like to hide, so the provision of caves, rock work and bogwood are beneficial. Live plants are advised although not essential.

A heater and thermometer are required. Good filtration is advised as these can be messy fish. Also purchase water test kits. Lighting should not be too bright as these fish predominantly originate from muddy lakes and rivers.

# Maintenance

At least once every two weeks a partial water change of 25 to 30% is strongly recommended (a siphon device is useful to remove waste from the gravel). The water should be tested regularly to ensure pollutants such as ammonia and nitrites do not build up. Ensure you either allow the replacement water to stand or aerate it to remove any chlorine present. Ideally treat all replacement water with tap water conditioner before adding to the aquarium.

Filters should be checked for clogging and blockages. If the filter needs cleaning then do not run it under the tap as any chlorine present may kill the beneficial bacterial population that has established in the media. Instead, it can be rinsed in the tank water which is removed during a partial water change as this reduces the amount of bacteria which are lost.

Good husbandry is essential as these fish can be stressed by even the smallest amounts of ammonia and nitrite. Test the water to monitor the ammonia, nitrite and nitrate levels every week, especially during initial set-up and after adding extra fish.

# Feeding

All of these fish are carnivores, preying upon small fish and crustaceans in the wild. Live fish should **not** be used to feed other fish in the home aquarium. These fish will readily accept frozen and prepared diets as they are voracious feeders and will accept aquarium foods easily.

There are many frozen foods available including bait shrimp, mussels, and beef heart. For juvenile fish the addition of bloodworms and small shrimps will be accepted.

Wolf fish are nocturnal therefore should be fed at night. The other species can be fed once or twice during the day, depending upon the individual fish. Ask your OATA retailer for advice. Remove any uneaten food to reduce waste build-up.

# Potential problems

A water quality problem will affect fish behaviour and can be shown by clamped fins, reduced feeding, erratic swimming and gasping at the surface. Immediately test the water if any of these symptoms are shown. If in doubt ask your OATA retailer for advice.

# Compatibility

Snakeheads can be kept with other large fish which they will be unable to eat. Piranhas require a small school to thrive, this is best achieved if bought when juveniles. It is not uncommon to find some of the group with nipped fins although this can be reduced by meeting dietary requirements.

Various *Plecostomus* species and *Synodontis* catfish can usually be kept successfully with the aggressive species. However, monitor them for injuries and remove if they become stressed or bullied.

# Breeding

Due to the temperament of most of the aggressive species and the fact that often they will be kept as a single specimen, breeding is not something that can occur readily.

Piranhas are one exception, although there have been only a few successful attempts made in the home aquarium so far.