

# MASWA Newsletter

MASWA Newsletter  
(February 2000)

**ATTENTION:** This month's MASWA meeting is **Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> February**. Check your calendar, because it could be today!!!

The meeting is to be held at Grant Magill's house. Grant has had a few meetings at his house now and every time, his tank has looked quite different from the previous viewing. It will be interesting to see what Grant is up to with his tank this time. Grant's address is 7 Begonia Place, Forrestfield...it's right near the Forrestfield Forum Shopping Centre. The meeting will begin at 7.30pm.

## Previous Meetings

**January's** MASWA meeting was held at David Bloch's house in Noranda. Considering the meeting had to be moved to a Thursday because of Australia Day, there was a surprisingly good turn-out of 14 people.

David's tank was looking a tiny bit cloudy because he had been working in the sump and stirred up some silt. The previous week, power to the tank had been lost for the entire day and unfortunately, nine fish had died. I think everyone was amazed that despite both of these problems, David's tank still looked fantastic.

Paul Groves kicked off the more formal part of the night with a 25 minute presentation of the 1999 Marine Ornamentals Conference that he attended late last year. Paul mentioned several developments in both the commercial and hobby sides of the marine ornamental game. Some of the more interesting ones were the commercial culture of live rock, obtaining larval fish to rear on plankton and then wean onto flake food, Martin Moe's success with rearing French Angels, the success of coral propagation and the breeding of anemones in raceways to maximise spawning success. Some negative aspects that Paul mentioned were that most American commercial breeding organisations are very secretive and will not pass on to others the secrets to their success. Perhaps a spin-off from this is that while a lot of breeding farms have started up, most have gone bust. To sum up, Paul said that the commercial breeding of fish produces a pretty dismal profit and consequently developments in this area are likely to stagnate. Live rock propagation is currently having problems due to pricing competition with wild rock, but coral propagation seems to be very successful.

David followed on from the talk about commercial propagation to give us the lowdown on how he runs his tank. He added some excellent information on Banggai Cardinals and how to sex them.

After the tour of his tank, David whipped out a Pocillopora coral and started chopping it up. No, David hadn't suddenly gone insane (David reached his current level of insanity quite some time ago now - Ed), he was just giving the members a demonstration on how to propagate corals. This was an incredibly informative presentation and anyone who saw it should now be able to start fragmenting their corals and sharing them around. Fragmentation of a soft coral (a *Dendronephthya* species in this case) and the stony coral were demonstrated. The soft coral cuttings were added to the list of prizes for the night's raffle.

## Membership Dues

Just a reminder to everyone, MASWA membership donations are due now! Five members renewed their membership at the January meeting, so they will continue to receive the newsletter and be entitled to come to meetings. Everyone else, if you haven't paid up by the March meeting, unfortunately, we won't be able to afford to keep sending the newsletter to you or be able to provide the once a month entertainment, nibbles, drinks and good quality subsidised raffle prizes.

## Raffle Time

### **Last meeting**

Three main prizes were up for grabs at the January meeting; a 1kg jar of InstaKalk calcium hydroxide (valued at \$33.00), an UltraLife X-Terminator Mantis Shrimp Trap (\$30.71) and a 100mL bottle of SeaChem Reef Plus food supplement (\$10.41). The Dendronephthya fragments were also added to the list as supplementary prizes. All main prizes were supplied to the society by Reefs Downunder at cost price. The Dendronephthya was purchased by the MASWA treasurer.

19 tickets were sold at \$2 each before it was decided to draw the night's raffle. Grant Magill's ticket was the first pulled out and he chose the Mantis Shrimp Trap. Andy Dolphin took out second prize and chose the ReefPlus (Which had gone walkabout, but was later found. It will be given to Andy at this month's meeting - Ed). Our youngest member, Ben Krause, got third prize which was the 1kg InstaKalk calcium hydroxide. John, Tony, Nathan and Darren each won a Dendro' cutting. Despite MASWA's raffle rule that you can't win two prizes at the one meeting, Ben and Andy were allowed cuttings as a second prize win, as there were two left over.

### **This meeting**

This month's prizes will be a 250mL bottle of Seachem Reef Complete (calcium, strontium and magnesium supplement) (valued at \$16.26), a 250mL jar of Seachem MatrixCarbon (\$15.93), a 250mL jar of Seachem SeaGel (blend of MatrixCarbon and PhosGard) (\$13.76) and a 68g jar of Nutrafin Max Marine Complete Food (\$10.07). A \$2 raffle ticket puts you in the draw to pick one of 4 prizes with a total value of nearly \$60!

## This Month's Presentation

David Bloch will be giving a presentation on the ins and outs of protein skimmers with particular focus on the most recent skimmer innovation, the downdraft skimmer and how it works. David has made quite a few of these skimmers himself and will be able to offer a few pointers for DIY'ers, plus give advice on the best places to buy materials.

## Giant Clam Mortality in Aquaria

### **By Robert J Toonen**

It is fairly common for small tridacnids (Giant Clams) to suddenly die in aquaria. They are quite susceptible to stress and the shipping and transfer between aquaria is a fair bit of stress for them. Also, despite our hobby claims to the contrary, the animals require a reasonable amount of food to do really well, and in nature they are effective filter-feeders on phytoplankton. After convincing a local petshop to start feeding their clams greenwater (phytoplankton) on a regular basis, their mortality rate dropped by over 50%! Even though I feed my tanks heavily with plankton that the clams can filter, I have lost about 1 in 3 of the small clams that I have bought over the years (and watching the local petshops, their numbers are surely much higher). Research on growth rates and nutritional requirements of tridacnid clams in the field shows that photosynthesis alone is *incapable* of supporting these animals. In small, rapidly growing clams, >65% of their energy comes from filtering organic particles from the water - they are so efficient that giant clams on the Great Barrier Reef were found to remove ~75% of small particles (2-50 micrometers - 1000 micrometres make 1mm) passing over the reef. The requirement for filtering decreases with size, such that large individuals get most of their energy from photosynthesis (~65%), but still require some filtering to make up the difference.

In aquaria (in the US, at least) snails are unlikely to be the cause of death, and unless you actually observed snails on the clam, I wouldn't worry about them (there are pics in *The Reef Aquarium: Vol 1* by Sprung and Delbeek, pg 305-306). You can examine the clam (on the inside edge between the mantle and the shell, where the snails like to hang out) to see if there are any predatory snails on your animals, but in my experience they are actually uncommon, and especially among cultured clams (which to the best of my knowledge are really the only ones available today in the US), so I consider predatory snails an unlikely threat in most cases.

(Since Rob wrote this, he tells me that he has heard back from a number of people who have had problems with pyramidellid snails (either *Tathrella* or *Pyrgiscus* spp.). Rob said, "I guess I should have said that the snails are fairly rare in both nature and aquaria (personally, I have never seen one in any of the clams I have purchased), but once established in a system, they reproduce quickly, and any clams passing through that system (even for a short period of time) are likely to be infected. Once these snails become established, they can decimate a clam population, and should be removed immediately if present." - Ed)

If I had to guess, I would say mortality probably has more to do with a stress (being shipped several times, or stung by the sweeper tentacles of a coral or anemone are real possibilities) or a nutritional problem. The stress is something that you can minimize by using good acclimatisation techniques, and making sure that the animal is out of reach of any stinging tentacles (particularly Aiptasia, which can often get right onto the lip of the shell and cause problems). The feeding is also easy to fix (as well as being good for your corals, too) by adding more phytoplankton to your tank on a regular basis. Finally, there are only so many ways a clam can die, and unless that death is a sudden predation event, it's almost always a gaping decline over a few weeks to a month. That doesn't really give any information about what caused the initial decline, or for how long it was actually occurring. Many, if not most, marine invertebrates are capable of withstanding very long periods (certainly months, and in some cases a year or more) of starvation while behaving completely normally. It is entirely possible that the clams you buy have been starved for some time before purchase (transshippers, wholesalers, and even many retailers do not feed their invertebrates), and could have been in rough shape before they are even brought home.

#### **Upcoming Meetings**

**February 23<sup>rd</sup>:** Grant Magill's house - 7 Begonia Way, Forrestfield.  
**March 29<sup>th</sup>:** Your house?  
**April 26<sup>th</sup>:** Your house?  
**May 31<sup>st</sup>:** Your house?

#### **MASWA's World Wide Web address**

<http://www.wantree.com.au/~conquest/andy/maswa/>

#### **Newsletter and General Inquiries**

to Nathan Cope E-mail address: [copen@one.net.au](mailto:copen@one.net.au)  
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#### **Membership and Treasury Inquiries**

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or phone on (08) 9375 2438 a/h

#### **MASWA Membership**

Currently MASWA requests an annual \$20 donation from members, \$10 for Junior members. This covers the cost of newsletters, drinks, nibbles and other costs associated with the society. Members will receive information sheets and discounts on some products.

#### **Friends in Common**

Jan Anderson, David Bloch, Dennis Bozil, Darren Collins, Nathan Cope, Andy Dolphin, Tony Fiorentino, Jim & Gloria Fletcher, Paul Groves, Peter Harris, Mike Hudson, Frank Krause, Craig Lawrence, Grant Magill, Phil and Caron Melvin, Peter and Marina Olive, Steve Tofts, Greg Weryk, Rick White.

If you've paid your money and your name is not on this list, tell David! Members on the web should check they are on the web site members list.

If you've paid your money and your name is not on this list, tell Andy! Members on the web should check they are on the web site members list.

*If there is anything you would like to know more about or anything you would like to add to the newsletter, call or send comments to the current editor, Nathan Cope. Remember, this is your newsletter.*

#### **DISCLAIMER**

The Marine Aquarists Society of WA is a name that we, as a group of friends with like interests have applied to ourselves for the purpose of information exchange. No one person, nor the group as a whole, can be held responsible for liabilities, injuries or other that may result either directly or indirectly as a result of our gatherings or the information exchange therein. The same applies to the information contained in this newsletter.