

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 & thermometer

Before purchase make sure:

- 1 Water parameters are as advised in this leaflet.
- 2 The aquarium in which the fish is to be housed is large enough for the adult of the species
- 3 If adding to an existing set up ensure the fish are compatible



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.



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If in doubt contact your OATA retail member for further information



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The voice of the ornamental fish industry

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How to care for...



Loaches

36 Tropical freshwater fish



Introduction

This diverse group of fish all belong to the Cobitidae family. Despite being closely related, this family includes the large clown loach, to the eel-shaped kuhli loach. But regardless of their physical differences, their demands are quite similar.

The relative ease of care of the species commonly available and their attractive coloration and markings make them an ideal introduction to most aquaria.

Water requirements

These fish all require very good water quality. The guide below is a guideline as they can be acclimatised to other water types:

Temperature: 20 to 26°C

pH: 6.0 to 8.0

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 19°dH)

Biology

Kuhli loach are easily recognisable by their eel-like shape and black and orange vertical bands. They can be quite a reclusive fish but are likely to be more visible if kept as a group. These fish rarely exceed 10cms.

Until recently, many of the loaches fell under the *Botia* genus. This included many popular species such as the clown loach, zebra loach, yoyo loach and dwarf loach. All are recognisable by their flat undersides, pointed noses and general catfish-like appearance. Clown loach can grow to 30cms while the dwarf loach reaches little over 5cms. Due to the number of species available, always check their final size with your OATA retailer.

All the species mentioned possess a small spine located just underneath each eye. The fish can raise these spines which may become tangled in nets when catching these fish.

Fish keepers new to clown loach are often startled to discover these fish laying on their backs or sides. For reasons unknown, these fish often exhibit this behaviour and are sometimes mistaken for being dead.

All the species of fish in the Cobitidae group have either reduced or absent scales. This makes them particularly susceptible to poor water quality, infections and more sensitive to medications.

Aquarium requirements

The larger species, such as the clown loach, require equally large aquaria. Consider at least 150 litres for fully grown specimens, although larger is always better. Loaches are generally slow growing species, so they can be kept in smaller aquaria as juveniles. However, always be prepared to upgrade your aquarium if choosing this option. For the smaller species, consider an aquarium of at least 60 litres. Most of these species are quite gregarious, so the tank must be large enough to support a number of individuals.

Rocks, suitable wood and synthetic ornaments are a must for these fish. These fish will feel more secure in an environment if they have the opportunity to hide. Providing them with this hiding opportunity allows them to be bolder and then they are more likely to be visible within the aquarium. When choosing ornaments, ensure they have no sharp edges as these could harm the delicate skins of these fish. For the same reasons, ensure the aquarium substrate is rounded too.

The smaller species, such as zebra loach, can often fit into the smallest of spaces. While not notorious jumpers, a secure aquarium hood is recommended. Also, be careful when using under-gravel filtration. These fish can sometimes enter the openings of the uplift pipes and get beneath the under-gravel plates.

Maintenance

At least once every two weeks a partial water change of 25 to 30% is strongly recommended (a siphon device is also 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

This group of fish are general omnivores accepting most proprietary food items. They will often take floating foods from the surface, but also enjoy sinking pellets and tablets.

The botia group also particularly enjoy aquatic snails which can sometimes be a pest in an aquarium. Such loaches are therefore a welcome introduction to many aquaria. However, if there is an abundance of other food items, these fish will often ignore snails.

When feeding, these fish often produce audible clicking noises. This sound originates from their pharyngeal teeth. Feed these fish 1 to 2 times a day removing any uneaten food if necessary to prevent fouling the water.

Potential problems

Owing to their reduced or absent scales, these fish are fairly susceptible to whitespot parasites. Furthermore, this same disadvantage also makes them sensitive to the medications required to cure them. Always refer to the manufacturer's instructions to ensure the medication is safe for these fish. If in doubt, ask your OATA retailer.

Compatibility

Most of the species mentioned are relatively peaceful. However, some species, such as the red-tailed botia (*Yasuhikotakia modesta*), can be quite aggressive and should only be mixed with larger, more robust species. Always check with your OATA retailer or consult fish books to determine if a specific species will be compatible with your existing fish or with any that you may wish to purchase in the future.

Breeding

Breeding these fish in home aquaria is seldom reported. Some of the more popular species are bred in captivity using special methods. Many of the species available are wild caught using bundles of different sized bamboo canes. The fish seek the refuge created by the hollow bamboo canes, providing easy size grading and creating very little environmental impact.