

Husbandry Update for February 6, 2012

River Journey

Seahorses

Our male bentstick pipefish in the *Indo-Pacific* exhibit has been carrying eggs for some time. Last week he gave birth before aquarist staff arrived in the morning. As a result, only one individual from the clutch was able to be collected and relocated to back-up for rearing. This baby pipefish now has its own little pen. It is being fed a diet of very small rotifer food three times a day. Right now this tiny pipefish appears a little weak, but it seems to have some fight. Aquarists will keep a close eye on its progress.

The other pipefish that were received over the last few weeks are already eating frozen foods. A male, received in this group, was also carrying eggs. He delivered the rest of his babies over the weekend. All of the new juveniles have already transitioned from eating rotifers to eating live brine shrimp. Their outlook appears very good.

Several images of these baby pipefish have been posted in the Aquarium blog at: <http://tennesseeaquarium.blogspot.com/2012/02/baby-pipefish-at-tennessee-aquarium.html>

Discovery Hall

A few more sailfin mollies were added to the *Estuary* exhibit in *Discovery Hall*. Visitors can observe the largest male courting all the female mollies on exhibit. He will swim parallel to them and flash his fins as a courtship display. This species breeds readily in captivity and some have already been successfully reared in our back-up tanks.

Tennessee River

On Wednesday, Jan. 25, 12 adult Barrens topminnows were collected from a location in Coffee County, Tn. These fish, four males and eight females, will be used as broodstock for 2012 production.

On Thursday, Feb. 2, 23 adult Barrens topminnows were collected from Lewis Creek in Cannon County, Tn. These fish, nine males and fourteen females, will be used as broodstock in the lab for 2012 production.

Thursday morning staff removed a large blue catfish and a large lake sturgeon from the Nickajack Lake exhibit. These animals were relocated to the Animal Care Facility to undergo quarantine prior to being relocated to the new *River Giants* exhibit. On Friday morning staff removed two ripsaw catfish from the *Flooded Amazon* exhibit. They will also go on display in the *River Giants* exhibit. The info for the four fishes moved is listed below:

- Blue catfish: 58 lbs and 3' 6.5" TL
- Lake sturgeon: 34 lbs and 4' 7" TL
- Ripsaw #1: 39 lbs and 3'2" TL
- Ripsaw #2: 48lbs and 3'5" TL



Lake Sturgeon photo from <http://tennesseeaquarium.com/OurAnimals/Fishes/LakeSturgeon.aspx>

Ocean Journey

Tropical Cove

The male tiger stingray (*Potamotrygon menchacai*), which was added to the *Freshwater Ray* exhibit a few weeks ago, was removed from the exhibit on Tuesday morning. He was being aggressive toward the female tiger ray, leaving her with several wounds around her spiracles (openings just behind the eyes). Stingray breeding can be aggressive, as the male usually bites the female around the edge of her disk, but these wounds were different. Aquarists are monitoring the female to be sure that her wounds do not get infected. The male is back in the *Quarantine Room* for now, but we are not giving up on him. Once the female has healed, we plan to reintroduce him to exhibit.

All of the stingrays were removed from the *Stingray Bay* exhibit Wednesday morning to have their barbs trimmed. The 10 male Atlantic stingrays were the first ones removed from the tank and placed in a large cart full of water. One at a time they were caught in a net, had their pit tags scanned (a tiny id tag in their back used to differentiate the animals) and their barbs trimmed. They were then returned to the tank. The eight female Atlantic stingrays were handled in the same manner. The bluespotted stingray and the two cownose rays were given the same treatment, though they do not have pit tags. The entire process only took about two hours. Their barbs are constantly growing, so trimming must be done every 2-3 months. This doesn't hurt the rays and ensures the safety of our guests.

Secret Reef Tank (T-30)

The green turtles have been together in The Secret Reef exhibit now for a couple of months. The turtles can still be seen occasionally chasing one another, but aggression between the two has slowed down considerably. Neither turtle has caused any real harm to the other during this adjustment period. While aquarists are monitoring their behavior closely, they are allowing the turtles to "sort things out themselves." Training each turtle to come to his own target pole, and only his pole, is still proving to be a challenge. Both turtles are eating well in spite of the learning process.



"Oscar" Photo by gypseygirl.photography
<http://tennesseeaquarium.com/OurAnimals/Reptiles/GreenSeaTurtle.aspx>



"Stewie" Photo by K. Estes

Boneless Beauties

The large coral formation in the top right corner of the *Live Coral* exhibit was removed to increase water flow across the rocks in that area. Good flow is important to keep "dead" spots from forming that could potentially create a condition known as "old" water. "Old" water is an area of stagnation with reduced oxygen and increased levels of dissolved compounds - an environment that, at the very least, is unhealthful and may prove fatal.