BRISBANE BIRD & EXOTICS VETERINARY SERVICE
Quality Care in Sickness and in Health

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General fish care

Introduction

Fish are very common pets, however, caring for fish is much more complex than most realise. There are thousands of different types of fish, each with their own set of requirements including tank setup, heating and diet. It is important to familiarize yourself with the requirements of the different species of fish you keep. Fish can actually be very long-lived, for instance, goldfish can live for up to 25years if cared for correctly.

Tanks

The tank should be positioned in a quiet environment away from excessive noise and sources of heat (sunlight through windows, heaters, fireplaces). Wide tanks, rather than tall, are recommended to maximise the surface area for oxygen exchange. Aerators are also recommended to increase the oxygen content of the water.
It is important not to have too many fish in your tank as this can lead to stress, lack of oxygen and pollution of the tank. Below are recommended guidelines for the **minimum** volume of water required per length of fish
Tropical Fish: 1.5-2L per 1cm of fish length (excluding tail)
Goldfish: 4L of water per 1cm of goldfish length (excluding tail)

Some species of fish, such as tetras, live in shoals and will stress if housed individually or small groups. These species should be kept in groups of six or more. Others species, such as male betta fish, are not as social and will fight other fish if housed together.

Substrate

Substrate is important to provide a suitable environment for good bacteria to live. This is important for water quality – please find further information in 'Water quality and the Nitrogen Cycle'. The substrate must be suitable for the species of fish. For example, goldfish should not have access to small pebbles they may try to swallow. It is important not to have sharp substrate, especially for species like catfish that like to sift around looking for food. Smooth pebbles would be more ideal.

Furnishings

It is important to have plenty of shelter such as rocks, plants or artificial decorations. This provides hiding places which minimises stress in your fish. Live plants also provide a food source for some species. It is important that all furnishings are secure and cannot be accidentally moved by the fish.

Heating

Most fish require a water heater to maintain a suitable water temperature. Each species will have different recommended temperatures, so it is important to research the species you have. Most heaters will have a built-in thermostat, but you should use a digital thermometer in the tank to ensure it is correct. For example:

Goldfish should be kept at 18-21C, while tropical freshwater fish should be kept at 24-28C. There are slight variations for different species. Tropical freshwater fish include:

- African fish such as rift-valley cichlids, congo tetras and African killifish
- South American fish such as live-bearing fish (e.g. mollies), angelfish, corydoras catfish and many types of tetras
- Southeast Asian fish such as rasboras, barbs and labyrinth fishes (e.g.gouramis, bettas)

Lighting

Artificial light is advised to provide a day/night cycle for your fish; 8-10hrs of 'daylight' is suitable for most species. Be sure to use a light suitable for aquariums.

Diet

Fish should only be fed what can be eaten within 2-5minutes. Uneaten food will pollute the water. It is important to feed the correct type of food to your fish as different species have specific dietary requirements. In general, goldfish have a plant-based diet, whilst tropical fish eat more protein. They also differ in how they eat their food. Surface feeders require floating food, and bottom feeders require sinking food. Other foods can be used to supplement the diet. Chopped vegetables and live plants are suitable for gold fish and some tropical fish. Invertebrates such as blood worms or brine shrimp are a great supplement for tropical fish.

Filtration and Water Quality

Water quality is very important, as poor water quality can easily lead to disease. It is important to have an appropriately sized filter for the size of your tank, and number of fish housed. Fish excrete ammonia as a waste product, which is extremely toxic. It is important that your tank has the appropriate good bacteria to convert ammonia to nitrite and nitrate to prevent toxic effects to your fish. This is referred to as the 'nitrogen cycle'. Other factors such as pH and chlorine can also have toxic effects on your fish. Please refer to the handout *'Water quality and the Nitrogen Cycle'* for more information.

Water quality testing

We highly recommend bringing a water sample in to your veterinary consultation as it assesses the general health of the environment in which your fish is living.

- *Bring about 50mL of water from the aquarium*
- ***Do not** clean the aquarium/pond prior to collecting the sample*

Microscopic examination of faeces

Aim to bring a faecal sample in a sealed container to your veterinary consultation. This can be collected from the tank.