

# WET LEAVES



**A Series On Books For The Hobbyist  
by SUSAN PRIEST**

Raise your hand if you are currently keeping a Pufferfish. One of you! You, in the back; are you raising your hand or scratching your nose? Now, raise your hand if you have kept, or have tried to keep a Pufferfish in the past. Al, could you help me out here and count the hands on the left side of the room while I count the right? As each of you looks to your right and left, you can see that you are in very good company. With their smiley-faced charm, and propeller-like locomotion, they practically plead with you to take them home! These fish are as notoriously appealing and hard to resist as they are notoriously misunderstood. This little book can help you bring some order to the confusion.

Sometimes referred to as "Swell Fish," or "Globe Fish," they have the ability to fill themselves up with air, or more commonly, water. This serves as a defense mechanism, protecting them against being swallowed by a larger fish. These fish do not have scales. Some of them have dermal spines and/or toxins on their skin, further protecting them against predators.

Without even realizing that they are doing so, most beginner fishkeepers will assume a one-species approach to a fairly commonly encountered fish; "a cory is a cory is a cory." These fish definitely lend themselves to this mindset. However, those of us with more experience should know better. Shame on us! As you will see later on, this author leaves us with no excuses.

Two unique physical features of the Pufferfishes should be mentioned. They have a pair of teeth which actually form a "beak," and it can inflict a nasty bite. If the beak becomes overgrown, it can impede the fish's ability to eat, and may actually need to be trimmed. Puffers also have finnage which is a reversal from the functionality of most fishes. Rather than steering with its pectoral fins and propelling itself with its caudal fin, Puffers move through the water via the screw-like movements of its pectorals, and use its caudal fin to steer.

Keeping these fish in an aquarium can be tricky. First, some of them are freshwater species and others are at home in brackish water. (There are some true saltwater species of Pufferfish, but

they are not under discussion in this book.) If the one you fell in love with in the store is of the brackish variety, and you quarantine it in dechlorinated water from your tap, well, the outcome will be unsatisfactory, to say the least. Let me pull you back to the first sentence for a moment where I talk about keeping A Pufferfish. The second major difficulty in keeping these fish is that they do not play well with others, particularly, but not exclusively, being aggressive towards members of their own species. Some of them are strictly carnivorous, while others are omnivorous. The list of difficulties continues to grow.

This is where one of the particular strengths of this book comes into play. Chapter five, "Puffer Species," gives specific information about eleven different species of Puffers. Our author tells us that "This chapter contains descriptions of the most popular-or unusual-species of Puffer." From dwarves to giants, from Nile to Peruvian, and from spotted green to red-eyed, detailed information is yours for the asking. It even provides photos of similarly-appearing species in order to help prevent confusion. For example: "The Banded Puffer (*Colomesus psittacus*) bears a strong resemblance to the Peruvian (*Colomesus asellus*)."

Breeding is naturally a topic of interest to hobbyists. By now it will come as no surprise to you that the breeding behaviors of Pufferfish differ from what we think of as the norm. Specifically, there are three different "methods" of breeding. 1) Substrate spawners dig a pit, lay and fertilize their eggs within, and guard them. 2) Rock and Stone spawners lay their eggs on a smooth flat stone, and do provide some fry care. 3) Plant Spawners lay eggs in leaves or roots, thereby providing some shelter. Which species utilize which methods can be learned by reading chapter five.

The absence of an index was a minor distraction in this small (64 page) book, especially since the contents provides a list of the topics included in each chapter. The photos are very good, and serve to add to the allure of these most unusual fishes. I would have liked to see a list of suggested resources for those readers who would like to delve a bit deeper into the subject, especially since the author seems to be alluding to the fact that there are even more species to be explored. I was impressed with the thorough coverage given to this seldom-written-about family of fish. If you are interested in obtaining a copy of this book, try contacting Lee Finley of Finley Aquatic books.



**Pufferfish  
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