

PROFILE OF A GUPPY BREEDER #6

Michael Soda

I GOT THE BLUES

Frank Schulterbrandt 2/15/2016



I have been away from the breeding and raising of guppies for a little over 10 years. So in my return to the South Jersey Guppy Group in June of 2014 it is to a pleasant surprise to see that so many breeders in the club are doing very well with guppies. It reminded me of the club back in the old days (late 1970s and early 1980s) when we had 6 IFGA judges and many good breeders. It is especially pleasant to see one breeder in particular doing very well with the breeding, raising and showing of guppies. The New England 2015 IFGA annual was the first show in 12 years that I attended as a member of the South Jersey Guppy Group. As a club the SJGG had just under one fourth of the 590 total entries at the New England show. Of the Best Of Show Female awards we won all four places. Of the Best Of Show Males awards we won four of the eight places. I was particularly happily surprised to see that Michael Soda won First Best Of Show with his Blue delta entry. About fifteen minutes later he did one better, Mike pulled off a double by also being awarded First Best Of Show in the tank class with you guessed it a BLUE TANK entry. I must say a well deserved award because there were some darn good other tank entries up for Best Of Show. So congratulations to Mike for his hard work in fighting back at nature (SANDY STORM) and his efforts paying off big time. Here are the questions posed to Mike.

1: When/how did you first get involved with tropical fish ? and when did you get involved with guppies and how long have you been raising guppies and why guppies ?

When I was twelve years old my parents gave me a 15 gal aquarium set up for Christmas which I kept in my bedroom for years as a community tank. Several years later I went to a North Jersey Aquarium Society all variety tropical fish show. This show also had a special guppy meet that many of the top guppy breeders from the northeast exhibited their guppies. After seeing such show type guppies compared to pet shop guppies I was hooked on guppies. It was at one such show that I met Peter Hutter who came in from Ohio to show his guppies. The blues he showed were outstanding and went best of show. I joined the North Jersey club and purchased some show quality breeding stock and set up around 15 tanks in my parent's basement. Most of my guppies were blue and multi-color which I bred until going off to college. With work, family life etc. 30 years would pass before my interest in guppies was once again stirred. Why guppies ? The different colors and the challenge of breeding a competitive strain and the level of completion.

2: Did you belong to any club before joining the SJGG ?

Yes I was a member of the North Jersey Aquarium Society, then the IFGA before joining the SJGG about 2004.

3: How many tanks do you have and what size tanks are they ?

My fish room is a rather small compact room which was already part of the house we purchased in 1984. I managed to get 60 tanks in the room (24) 10 gallon (14) 5 gallon. (4) 20 gallon low (4) 15 gallon and (14) 2 ½ gallon. The 2 ½ gallon tanks are for fry and also I set some of my breeders up in 2 ½ gallon tanks. I often wish I had a larger room with more tanks. But I have resisted expanding the room which forces me to be more selective in my breeding due to lack of space and tanks.

4: If you could would you use 20 gallon longs vs the regular 10 gallon tanks for guppies?

I do have four 20 gallon low tanks. These are on the bottom level of a rack. They are used for mature males. The water temp is a little cooler then the higher tanks. Feeding and water changes for these 4 tanks is less. I find the mature males seem to hold up better under these conditions and live longer.

5: What are your favorite colors / types of guppies ?

My favorite guppy type are the deltas but I do like swords. I must say I like all colors but HB PASTELS HB AOC are my favorite followed by BLUE then HB BLUE then PURPLE and finally GREEN.

6: What was / is the hardest Guppy strain that you have worked with and why ?

The HB PASTEL can be very challenging. Most HB PASTEL strains have very good caudal and dorsal color match along with good dorsal shape. Caudal shape can be a problem with rounded caudal corners being a problem The main problem I find is HB PASTEL grow at a slower rate than most guppy strains. Getting a 1:1 body to caudal can take 10 to 12 months. It becomes difficult to keep them in show condition for that period of time especially caudal condition

7: Of the following colors BLUE HB , BLUE and HB AOC of the three color strains which is your favorite and which is the hardest to work with ?

Of these three colors I lean towards HB AOC as a favorite. All three can have their own unique problems. The HB AOC being a patterned color can be more difficult to get at caudal -dorsal color match. Within a drop males will have a variety of pattern from under marked to over marked. With selective breeding I have been able to get a more consistent pattern. Coming up with a matching tank entry in HB AOC is always a challenge.

8: How many times a day do you feed your guppies and what do you feed them ?

I feed my guppies three times a day but in a manner I call power feeding. All guppies get a dry flake in the AM. The very young fry get Hikari First Bite all others get one of the flake foods I use. Except for the very young fry I feed a small amount of flake and will repeat feeding 3-4 times for those tank that eating all that is given. In an hour all fry and juvenile guppies get live baby brine shrimp. I do not feed BBS to adult mature guppies that are show ready. Around noon I feed a pellet food to all (except young fry). I slightly over feed the pellets so that there will be pellets that sink to the tank bottom. The guppies will pick at the pellets the rest of the afternoon. At this time for the young fry another feeding of fine flake. At around 5 pm I repeat the morning feeding. Three times a week I feed adult frozen brine shrimp to all ages that are large enough to consume it. The pellet I feed is fresh water 0.6mm pellet (water stable) from brine shrimp direct. As far as flake food I vary it but only use those which list the first 3-5 ingredients as a non-cereal One such food is omega-one flake.

9: What is your water maintenance routine and your lighting system (how long the lights are on / off) ?

I do a 50 percent water change once a week (3 times a week on fry 30 days and younger). I replace half of the water removed on the same day and the balance on the next day. This I believe is less a shock. I got this idea from Gene Baudier years ago. I also add Amquel Plus at this time. My water source does not have any chlorine so I fill directly from the tap and adjust for temperature. The Amquel Plus is used to help control ammonium, nitrite and nitrate if present. Main lighting is two 40 w florescent bulbs on 8am to 8pm. I have other lighting over tanks used only when working in the room.

10: What was the funniest thing that happened to you while you have been breeding guppies ?

Some years ago when I was working full time I casually mentioned to my wife that I was only able to feed the fish twice a day on work days. My wife's work place at the time was a 15-minute drive from our home. Without my knowledge she decided to come home on her lunch time and feed the fish. This went on for some time before I began to notice changes in the fish room like things slightly moved and a little less food in containers. A good idea but did end it since the fish were doing ok without this extra attention. Thanks again Stella.

11: What was the worst thing that happened to you while you have been breeding guppies ?

Storm "SANDY "resulted in the loss of my entire fish room. We were out of power for 14 days and no generator at that time. A number of strains such as HB PASTELS were 10 years in the making. I was seriously

thinking of not starting up again. My wife however encouraged me to stay in the hobby. The following April Jack Mertz and George Steckert got me going again by generously giving me breeding stock.

12: How long did it take for you to get your first IFGA first place award and what color was it ?

I believe it was three years before I took a first place with HB PASTELS. Had a number seconds up to that point.

13: Besides Baby Brine Shrimp what is your two favorite foods to feed your guppies?

I like to feed a variety of good quality flake and pellet foods and adult frozen brine shrimp. Most important is watch how much the fish like a particular food in selecting what you feed. If the fish like the food, they will eat well and grow.

14: How many lines of your favorite color strain do you have?

Because I'm limited in the number of tanks I have only one line in some strains. However, a number of the colors I work with are compatible for crossing. Example I have two related strains of blues which I will cross when needed. I have one line of HB BLUES but will cross them to my blues when I think an outcross is needed I do the same with purples keeping only one line and crossing to blue. I do keep two lines of greens that I cross with each. If I had more tanks I would keep more than one strain for each color but so far I'm able to maintain my color strains with this approach.

15: At the 2015 International Fancy Guppy Association Annual show hosted by the New England Guppy Fancy Guppy Association you pulled off a double Best Of Show award. There was a total 590 entries and you won first Best Of Show in the single male class with a BLUE delta and you also won first Best Of Show in the Tank entry class also with BLUES. That is quite a feat, what was your reaction and how did you feel when you found out that you won best of show , much less two pull that off for a double ?

I must say such a win was totally unexpected and surprising. All of us who breed and show guppies put in a great deal of time and effort to try and produce a good show specimen. When show time comes you select an entry you feel is show competitive and the rest is up to the judging. When you have a win you feel rewarded for your efforts.

16: Where did the blues that you have originate from and how long have you been working that color?

I have worked with blues almost as long as I have been breeding guppies. I started with hb pastels and hb AOC but then added BLUES a year or so later. My first BLUES were second hand from a Stan Shubel strain. Later the South Jersey Club purchased two trios from Stan Shubel. George Steckert and I each bred one trio and made the offspring spring available to the club members. At one show in Michigan, Stan Shubel put up for auction a BLUE trio and a HB BLUE trio . I bid and won the HB BLUE trio which produced very good HB BLUES. I gave George Steckert some of these Shubel HB BLUES which turned out to be very fortunate. When "SANDY" hit all was lost. I was able to get back from George the original Shubel blue and HB BLUE strains. In crossing the BLUES to the HB BLUES I produce a percentage of blues. These BLUES from the HB BLUE cross became my 2nd line of BLUES. Three years ago I purchased at the New England show auction a trio of BLUES from Gary Carr .

These BLUES are a blend of several top BLUE strains according to Gary. I crossed them into BLUE line # 2 then backed crossed. Some of the BLUES I showed were the results of this cross.

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