

**NORTHERN GOLDFISH
& PONDKEEPERS
SOCIETY**
A Nationwide Society
NEWSLETTER



September 2019



Member Alan Ratcliffe's prize-winning London Shubunkin, back in the 1998's. This photo was taken by Practical Fishkeeping magazine for the following article. Back in those non-digital age a film camera was used with a flash attachment. This white-outed the blue background of this exceptional fish – a better reproduction of the blue colour is in the advert made by QED advertising agency. See below too

As promised last month, here is that article from a 1999 PFK magazine about Alan Ratcliffe's prize-winning Goldfish.....



Gold fingers

Breeding goldfish isn't so easy, especially if you want show quality offspring, as **KAREN YOUNGS** found out when she met **ALAN RATCLIFFE**...

If you think goldfish are for beginners or that one goldfish is much the same as another, then take a peek inside Alan Ratcliffe's fish-house in Lancashire and I can guarantee you'll soon have a change of attitude.

In fact you may well leave with the thoughts that a goldfish aquarium would look really nice in the corner of your living room instead of the telly, or even in the dining room - after all you never really liked that table, did you?

The fact is, Alan Ratcliffe's fish are quite unlike any you'll see at most local aquatic outlets. He's been keeping goldfish for nearly half a century and breeding them for a good deal of that time. In fact, he bred his first goldfish at the tender age of 11. He only managed to rear two from the brood but that small success set Alan off on a road which has led to him establishing some excellent breeding stock. His fish are truly stunning.

Comet tales

At the moment Alan is concentrating mainly on the singletails: Common goldfish, London and Bristol Shubunkins and the Comet. As far as he knows he is the only

Photography: Neil Heyworth

102 October 99



Goldfish

The goldfish is the most commonly-kept fish but unfortunately it often doesn't get the care it deserves due to a lack of understanding on the part of its owner. This isn't always the case, however, and the Common goldfish has been many a fishkeeper's first introduction to the hobby.

person in the country who is breeding a show strain of Comets. He won Best in Show with one of these on the weekend before our visit. He has been breeding Comets for around 20 years but the current strain goes back 15 years or so. Getting them to the current high standard has not been easy. He explained that although this is quite a common fish that you can go to any fish outlet and buy, the quality is often quite poor. Starting off with low quality fish makes establishing a show quality bloodline even more difficult.

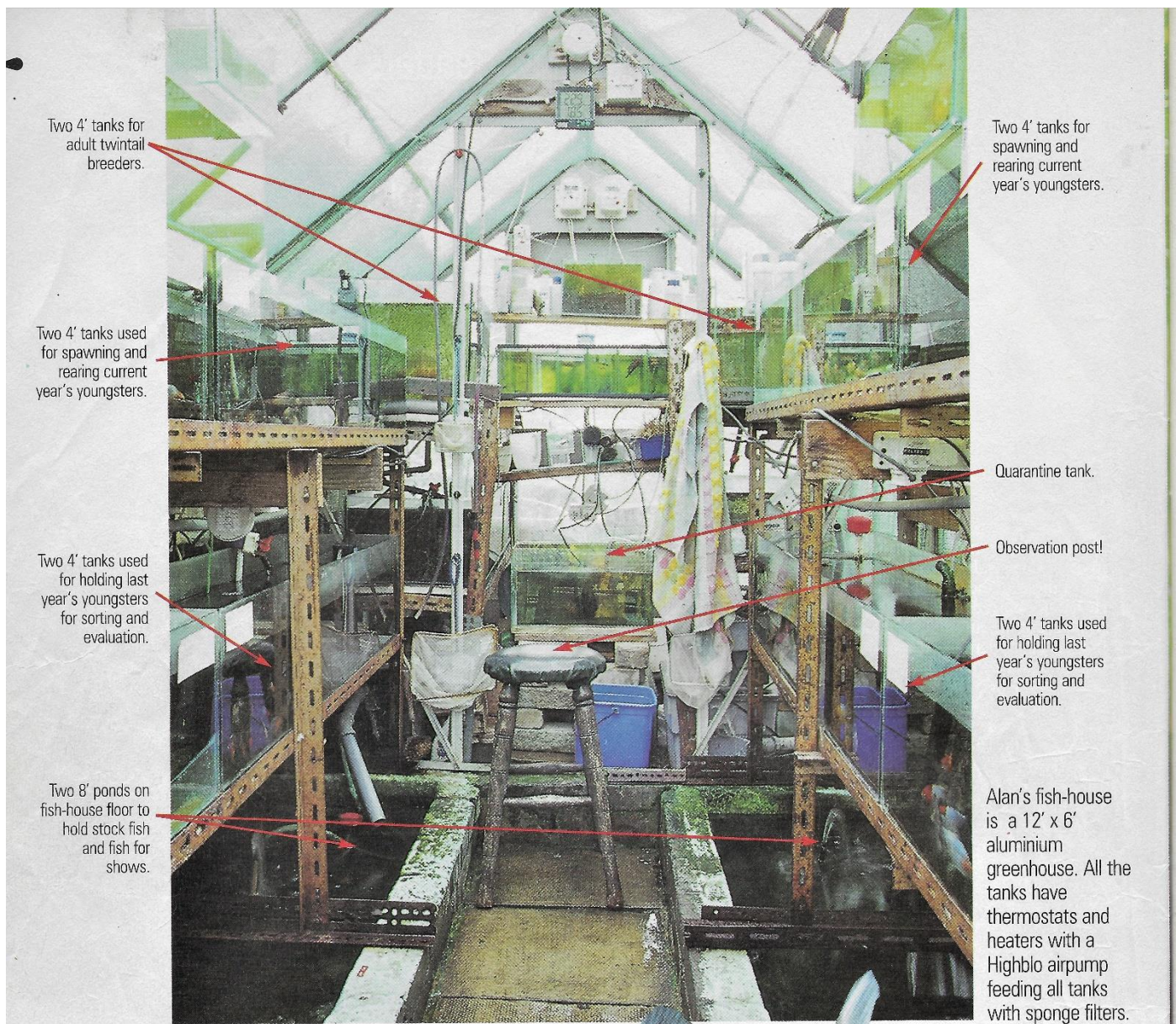
"With tropicals you can go down to your local shop and buy virtually any of the ones you want to breed," he explained. "But with something like goldfish if you want to start specialising then it's very difficult to get the bloodlines. There aren't all that many people who specialise in goldfish.

"Once you have a good established strain of common goldfish or Comets you can get a spawning of a few thousand eggs and quite a few hundred of those will hatch out. What you need to do is take about 50 or 100 of those, depending on how much rearing space you have and then feed the others back to the parents - which is what would happen in nature anyway. Then just rear the others because you can concentrate more time and energy on those few fish. Out of that batch you'd be bound to get a breeder's team and enough fish

for future generations to breed off. From 50 common goldfish you'd definitely end up with 20 reasonable specimens and 10 which are very good.

"But with more sophisticated goldfish like Veiltails it's more difficult to get really good fish because the deformities and shapes and colours are far greater.

A selection of Alan Ratcliffe's fish including Shubunkins, Comets and some of this year's baby Veiltails which are still growing on. His champion Shubunkin is shown left.



Two 4' tanks for adult twintail breeders.

Two 4' tanks for spawning and rearing current year's youngsters.

Two 4' tanks used for spawning and rearing current year's youngsters.

Quarantine tank.

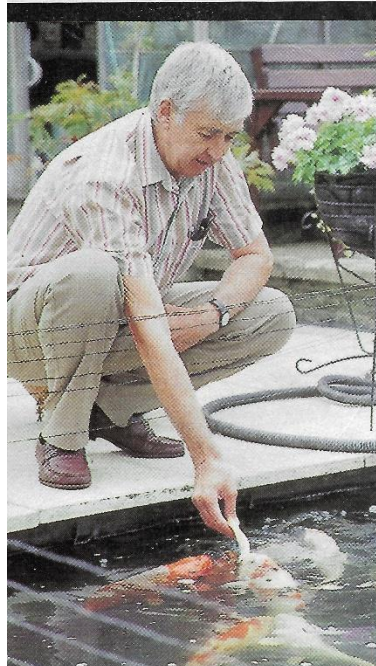
Two 4' tanks used for holding last year's youngsters for sorting and evaluation.

Observation post!

Two 4' tanks used for holding last year's youngsters for sorting and evaluation.

Two 8' ponds on fish-house floor to hold stock fish and fish for shows.

Alan's fish-house is a 12' x 6' aluminium greenhouse. All the tanks have thermostats and heaters with a Highblo airpump feeding all tanks with sponge filters.



Fact file: Alan Ratchliffe

How did you get into the hobby? "My grandfather always had goldfish. Then when I was about 10 a neighbour of a friend of my father's had a pond in the garden. I used to spend my day by the side of that pond."

Do you keep your fish indoors or out? "Both... I have a fish-house where I keep the best stock and seven ponds, most of which are used to grow-on fish. I also have a Koi pond."

Why do you show your fish? "Predominantly to make sure mine are keeping up with everyone else's. You can start to go "blind" - you look at your own fish and you can't see the faults."

Have you made any mistakes? "I actually gave away my champion Shubunkin when he was a baby. The colours take a couple of years to sort themselves out on this type of fish and the trouble is when you breed fish you have to get rid of some of them as soon as you can



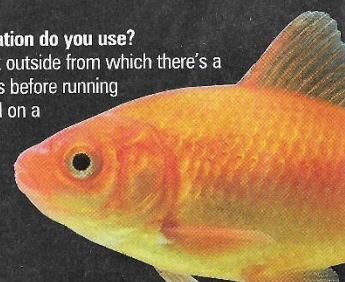
to allow room for the others to grow on. There's a pet shop in town which I give the extra fish to and when I took a batch of London Shubunkins down about seven years ago, he was one of them. He didn't look a bit like he does now.

A few months later I was in the shop looking round and I spotted this little Shubunkin. I decided to buy it and while the shop owner bagged it up I asked where it had come from.

She said: "It's one of yours." Apparently a child had bought it, got fed up with it and took it back to the shop."

What method of filtration do you use?

"I have a 200 gal. tank outside from which there's a drip feed into the tanks before running to waste. It's operated on a timer. In addition I use Fluval 1 and 2's to remove particles and sponge filters when I have baby fish."



You'd be lucky to get a dozen that are even worthwhile keeping for the next generation let alone show.

For the last 15 years Alan has been hand-stripping his fish to breed them. He says it's not difficult; it's just having the courage to do it - and by using that method you know who the parents are.

Alan joined the Northern Goldfish Society about 20 years ago and has been the Show Secretary for the last 12 years or so. He also belongs to a number of other societies including the Goldfish Society of Great Britain and the North Eastern Goldfish Society which was formed in 1997. Over the years he has had lots of success with not only breeding but showing his fish and has come away with several Best in Shows.

More variety

Alan's fishkeeping hasn't just been limited to goldfish. He has kept tropical fish over the years. So what made him concentrate on goldfish?

"I get bored with just producing say, danios where the only difference between one fish and another is condition and size. I prefer to breed fish where you can get a lot of variations. That's why I like to work with goldfish. Things like finnage are very varied, even in Common goldfish."

Whether goldfish are actually coldwater fish is an interesting point as far as Alan is concerned.

"My argument is that goldfish will go down to about 40°F and will survive at that temperature - so will Golden orfe and rudd and others. But I've had goldfish in my fish-house up to 102°F and I haven't lost one. Can you name another fish that will go to both extremes? They are much happier round about the upper 50's to the lower 70's and will breed in the upper 60's to low 70's but providing you have the oxygen in the water they'll survive at high temperatures."

Alan feeds his goldfish 'Aquarian' food, small trout pellets, daphnia, and frozen bloodworm. He gives Hikari Gold to his baby fish, making it into a putty with a little water. Then he rolls it into a ball and drops it in the tank where they nibble at it all day.

If you'd like some of Alan's goldfish the best time to contact him is July to October. But please don't expect him to sell you one of his goldfish to keep in a bowl... Write to Alan c/o PFK and we'll pass your letters on to him. ■



Above: Alan is also a keen Waterlily collector. He has over 30 varieties.

Far left: Alan also keeps Koi, one of which is over 20 years old.

Left: Some of Alan's growing-on ponds. He uses nets where necessary as a precaution against herons.

The Aquarist & Pondkeeper in 1998 also featured Alan's London Shubunkin in an Aquarian advertisement.

The advertisement is split into two panels. The left panel shows a small portrait of Alan Ratcliffe, a man in a suit, with the text "ALAN RATCLIFFE Top Aquarist" below it. The right panel features a large, detailed image of a London Shubunkin fish, which is white with large black spots and patches of red and orange. The background is a dark, rocky underwater scene. At the bottom right, there is a blue and yellow can of Aquarian Goldfish Flakes. Text is overlaid on the image, including a quote from Alan Ratcliffe and a testimonial about the fish food.

"It has won at every major UK coldwater show ... thanks to AQUARIAN"

When top aquarist Alan Ratcliffe bred and reared his spectacular London Shubunkin he couldn't have imagined how successful it was going to be.

"It's a stunning fish," says Alan, "winning Coldwater Champion of Champions at the 1997 British Aquarist Festival – its fifth big win of the year! AQUARIAN is the only flake I feed. It's a highly nutritious food, my fish thrive on it. I recommend AQUARIAN to all fishkeepers."

RECOMMENDED BY TOP AQUARISTS

After 20 years and many, many generations spawned from that male London Shubunkin there are descendants in Alan's fish-house, and they still carry those colourful genes.



(photographed in Alan's fish-house August 2019)

Member's Write

The debate is interesting about allowing over-sized fish in the 3" class to be re-entered in the over 3" class.

Firstly the catalogue will be wrong as it would have been printed for the original entry list.

Secondly we at Bristol have had the same problem with larger fish than 3" being entered in the under 3" class. Such fish should be disqualified and not taken into account for any other award.

Without a First Place sticker on the tank the Judges judging the special awards should just pass the fish by.

Regards, Ian Mildon BAS

This Month's Top Tip

What are the best house plants to put in your fish-house? According to an American magazine the top one is a Rubber Plant *Ficus elastica*.

This was in the (now defunct) FAMA (Freshwater & Marine Aquarium – was very good) who also advised that it must not be overwatered or the leaves turn yellow and drop off. However, it only needs medium light and temperatures (like Goldfish) and is best in a heavy soil base, but good drainage.



They also recommended Corn Plants *Dracaena fragrans*. Moist soil, room temperatures and is a very slow grower.

But over the years it can get very large.





Also the Saddle Leaf *Philodendron selloum* which accepts any temperature above freezing and even accepts neglect (they said).

This is the Monstera variety.

FAMA stated that Ferns are a good choice because they like high humidity so a fish-house is ideal. Use them as a hanging basket plant too. They recommended The Boston Fern *Nephrolepis exalata Bostoniensis* but that sounds like it is only available in the USA.

Bristol Aquarist Society

Their Open Show and Auction was held on Sunday 1st September in the Hengrove Community Centre. Attending were our President Bill Ramsden (and me, the Vice President!) with Chairman Sherridan Moores and Judge David Roberts. Bill, Sherridan and David Roberts can be seen here judging the 22 Breeders who entered 92 Goldfish in the 40+ Classes.



Best in Show was a Veiltail by Andrew Barton President of AMGK



Both Sherridan and David Roberts won Firsts – Sherridan with a Paradise Fish in the Ponds Class!



Not a Goldfish, but it still won a Rosette (from Show Secretary Ian Mildon)



The Auction was well attended (about 50) with 69 Lots of home-bred pedigree Fancy Goldfish at bargain prices. See all about it at www.bristol-aquarists.org.uk

Minutes of the September Meeting

A pre-show meeting where final plans for our Open Show were discussed and finalized. If you can possibly help set up the tanks, please visit any time after 1pm on Friday 14th September at St Matthews Hall in Stretford M32 8HF. Also visit the Show on Saturday, even if you are not a Shower, there should be good Goldfish in the Auction.

There were discussions on the best way to decide the Best in Show - a new system evolved and will be used at the Open Show. Full details will be in the October Newsletter.

Sherridan reported that he has booked Rooms in Hull for the NGPS Social Weekend. This will be from Friday to Sunday November 1st to 3rd (or part thereof) and we plan to visit their Public Aquarium 'The Deep'. If you want to be included please contact Sherridan on 01619697567 ASAP.

Hope to see you October 8th, 8pm at The Church Inn, Prestwich M25 1AN.