

ALERT DIVER

THE MAGAZINE OF DIVERS ALERT NETWORK

SUMMER 2017

2017 PHOTO CONTEST: OCEAN VIEWS

THE TUAMOTUS:
FRENCH POLYNESIA'S
MARINE WILDERNESS

ANILAO CRITTER QUEST

DIVING THE UNESCO
WORLD HERITAGE SITES



OUT OF LINE

I just read Stephen Frink's article "Reef Rage" (Publisher's Note, Spring 2017), about his friend who was kneeling on the sand underwater when a divemaster reacted quite severely, signaling that he was "killing all the stuff in the sand" and initiating a fight by "deploy[ing] [his] middle finger" and "pull[ing] his knife out." I was shocked.

The article went on to point out how careful divers must be — even on the sand — to prevent killing marine life, but I was waiting for Frink to also reprimand the divemaster for his actions, and I was extremely bothered when he didn't. Don't get me wrong, I value protecting marine life, but the real issue to me here is the fight. A divemaster rebuking a diver for acting carelessly is appropriate; a divemaster endangering a diver's life by starting an underwater fight is not. There are several ways the divemaster could have handled the situation, and what he did cannot be excused.

— *Rivky Saxon, age 16, via email*

HOME AQUARIUMS: A SUSTAINABLE ENDEAVOR?

We read every issue of *Alert Diver* cover to cover and applaud your work in putting out such a great magazine every quarter. While "A Reef in the Living Room" (Member to Member, Spring 2017) extolled the virtues of keeping marine ecosystems in the home and discussed the technical difficulties involved, we were dismayed that there was no mention of the sourcing of marine life for this hobby.

Many of the fish sold to consumers to stock saltwater aquaria are captured on reefs around the world and suffer very high mortality rates, both locally



and in transit. The environments from which the animals are taken are often damaged as well.

We believe this issue should have been addressed in the article. Divers are encouraged repeatedly to be environmentally responsible, yet this article remained silent on this aspect of the hobby. Our opinion is that it is not appropriate to remove marine life from the reefs on which we all enjoy diving and are committed to protecting, to supply this hobby. At a minimum, the article should have covered this issue and listed ways to engage in the hobby sustainably and responsibly.

— *Michael Salvatorezza and Christopher Weaver, Eco-Photo Explorers, via email*

The author of "A Reef in the Living Room" and the editors of *Alert Diver* may not be aware that tens of millions of coral reef fishes, invertebrates and coral colonies are killed every year to fulfill the demand for wildlife created by the saltwater aquarium hobby. Up to 90 percent of the marine life sold for saltwater tanks is captured illegally with cyanide, a deadly practice responsible for massive destruction of coral

reefs throughout the Philippines and Indonesia.

Fundamentally, the personal possession of coral-reef wildlife is an unsustainable endeavor. The marine-life deaths that likely resulted from the trials, tribulations and mistakes referred to by the article's author are common and help explain why most saltwater aquarists quit within a year of getting into the hobby. They're also the end of a long line of losses that began on the reef with a squirt of cyanide or the sharp jab of a "tickle stick" and continue with barotrauma or other rapid-ascent-related injuries and the stress of starvation and transport across the planet in small bags of dirty, oxygen-deprived water.

We divers are a privileged group with opportunities to experience a beautiful and fragile ecosystem that relatively few on Earth are granted. Some would say that with this privilege comes the responsibility to help conserve and foster stewardship of these rapidly disappearing rainforests of the sea. At the very least we should strive to do no harm. Simply put, saltwater aquariums, except for those that contain only verifiably captive-bred organisms, are driving

the destruction of coral reefs. Divers who are considering one for its decorative, entertainment or educational value would be wise to apply the motto we learned when we first got certified: Take only photos, leave only bubbles. One aquarium can undo a lifetime of exceptional buoyancy control, careful fin placement and respectful marine life encounters.

— **Rene Umberger, executive director, For the Fishes, Kihei, Hawaii**

Editor's note: We received many letters from DAN members who expressed concerns about the ethics and sustainability of keeping home aquariums. For a different perspective, we reached out to Jeff Turner, president of Reef Aquaria Design.

There are many examples of marine ornamental aquaculture businesses that have thrived while selling responsibly collected and/or aquacultured marine animals. And many hobbyists and consumers purposely support these businesses.

Aquacultured clownfish, gobies, pseudochromis, assessors, blennies, seahorses, cardinals, dragonets, filefish, marine bettas, jellyfish and others are always available in the marketplace. Damsels, tangs, angelfish, anthias, batfish, grunts, jacks, drums and many other species are being aquacultured consistently, and the technology for doing so is improving and becoming more widespread.

Aquacultured corals, both stony and soft, and several species of tridacna clams are widely available to consumers in the U.S. and abroad, and these make up a significant portion of the corals used in North American aquariums. Thousands of people are growing hard and soft corals

in the U.S., and more than 300 species of aquacultured "coral frags" are always available to consumers who want a slice of the coral reef in their home.

Consumers today prefer to purchase aquacultured or maricultured live rock over wild-caught options. Live rock sold in stores in North America does not come from the Philippines; in fact, the Philippines government banned export of live rock and corals from the Philippines in the late 1980s. Fiji is the No. 1 exporter to North America of wild-caught live rock, and the largest exporter of living marine animals in Fiji is increasing its aquaculture efforts every year.

More information about aquacultured marine life available for purchase in North America can be found at orafarm.com, sustainableaquatics.com, waltsmith.com/Aquaculture, proaquatix.com, seaandreef.com and jellyfishart.com.

A healthy aquacultured reef aquarium is an educational window on the sea. In 2008 we designed, installed and commissioned the Indo-Pacific Coral Reef Aquarium at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History in Washington, D.C., using only aquacultured coral frags. Millions of visitors view this reef aquarium every year and learn about coral ecosystems from it.

A book, photo or article can't come close to what an aquarium can teach you about ocean environments. People learn to respect what they see and know through experience. Diving and aquariums are two great ways to learn about our beautiful coral reef environments and how to conserve and protect them. **AD**

— **Jeff Turner, president, Reef Aquaria Design, Coconut Creek, Fla.**

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