

Don't Forget to Turn Out the Aquarium Lights!

When leaving behind your fish for a vacation, be sure you leave them in the capable hands of a seasoned aquarist, if possible.

Posted: July 31, 2009

Make sure to check out the slideshow at the end of this blog for more photos! With summer half over my family is finally going on some long-overdue vacation getaways. The first one was this past weekend, when I along with my wife and daughters traveled up the coast to Avila Beach, a quaint little beachside community tucked in a cove next to the turquoise waters of the Pacific. Avila Beach is an estuary area and one of the southernmost steelhead trout (an ocean-going species) streams, where the fish return annually to spawn.

Avila Beach has three long piers that extend out into Port San Luis Harbor. Of the three, two are open to the public. At the entrance of the Hanford Pier, the northernmost pier, there is a fish gutting trough that was occupied by four or five fishermen, and my wife and daughters, once they overcame their initial disgust at seeing live fish being gutted, were begging the knife-wielding gents for fishy entrails. Why? This section of the pier is swarmed by dozens of brown pelicans greedily chasing and fighting for fish scraps that are thrown over the side and into the water. My three girls thought it was great fun. "Who says you can't have fun for free?" I offered, as we headed back to where we were staying.

Making Arrangements

Most pets can do OK if left to their own devices overnight, or perhaps for a day or two, but any longer and problems can and often do arise.

Of course, anyone with clear, spelled-out directions in hand can look after your dog or feline. Some reptiles like bearded dragons can do quite well for up to a week on their own, provided you leave them with full food and water dishes. But fish are another matter. Many should be fed, not overfed, daily. There are also partial water changes that need to be performed with any system that has a fairly substantial bioload (lots of fishes and invertebrates). And depending on the system, there are all kinds of timers, settings, on-off switches, etc. that sometimes need tending to.

It doesn't take much for perfect water chemistry to get out of whack, especially if you're out of town and you've left your tank and the fate of its inhabitants in the hands of your neighbor who doesn't know a clownfish from a chromis, or who, even worse, doesn't care that much about fish to begin with. ("Hmmm, I seem to be forgetting something, but I can't quite put my finger on it. Now what was that thing I was supposed to do for Joe?")

If you want to go on a trip and fondly think of the dazzling colors, interesting behaviors and individual personalities of your fish rather than picturing them floating belly up in pea soup, or sizzling on your neighbor's grill (how the mind can wander), then I suggest you leave their care in the hands of a trusted fellow aquarist, or at least run a good nonaquarist friend or relative through a crash course in aquarium and fish care and provide them with clear, concise, spelled-out directions of what to do and when to do it while you're gone. Bon voyage!

[Back to Blogs>>](#)