

“Nemo Effect”

Finding Nemo is a gift to the aquarium hobby that keeps on giving.

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Being properly hydrated for a busy night of Halloween schooling is important. Lil Nemo safely perches in the arms of his resident anemone (*Dwighticus daddyii*).

Last Saturday, I went trick-or-treating with a bunch of parents, friends of mine, along with our collective gaggle of young ones, all decked out in their Halloween finery and clutching empty bags yearning to be filled to seam-splitting excess with teeth-rotting sweetness. As if a silent starting gun went off, my 7-year-old daughter and her school pal quickly bolted ahead of the pack and presented themselves at the first door.

Our wandering, enthusiastic menagerie of trick-or-treaters consisted of 10 young ladies and one young gentleman who answers to the name Jonathan. In fact, it is Jonathan, clad in his Nemo outfit, who is pictured. Initially, I mistook Jonathan for his twin sister who was adorned in a bumblebee outfit and who was in the front driver's seat of the double stroller they both share. Hey, it was an easy mistake, as every fish geek knows that Nemo and his ilk (clownfishes) are protandrous hermaphrodites, meaning they start out as males and later change into females as the need arises. I had a 50-50 chance, and I guessed wrong. No harm, no foul, as they say.

Jonathan's costume was out-of-the-ballpark cute, but he seemed to be a bit put out when he spent any amount of time sitting with his newfound caudal peduncle curled up under his caboose. Fish were never designed to squish or fold in half in order to “sit.”

Initially, Jonathan's outfit caught me off guard, with its bright, hunter-vest orange; the whimsicality of it and the fact that I didn't expect to see Nemo shoaling in the streets of my local community on Halloween 2009. The Pixar movie *Finding Nemo* hit theaters more than six years ago, but it has made a lasting impression on young, developing minds, as well as had an affect on the aquarium hobby and the way we look at oceans and the life in them, as few movies ever have. Possibly, the only ocean-themed celluloid to have greater impact, but for entirely different, negative reasons, was *Jaws*.

The Nemo Effect

Nemo's influence has been huge; it has been worldwide and multi-generational (e.g., Jonathan and his folks). Virtually overnight and on the movie's coattails, multitudes of Americans began clamoring for their very own Nemos in small tanks. Thus, *Finding Nemo* helped to create commercially viable clownfish fisheries in various western Pacific locales, providing livelihoods for many fishermen and their families. The instant market created for clownfishes helped to push sustainable marine captive-breeding efforts to the forefront and provided an economic booster shot to large captive-breeding operations like ORA (Oceans, Reefs and Aquariums), which is the largest marine ornamental hatchery in North America. Of the world's 28 recognized species of clownfishes, ORA now captive breeds 17 of them.

As the growth in the clownfish industry has exploded since *Finding Nemo*, the rise in popularity of simple-to-set-up, easy-to-maintain nano aquariums has kept apace. Where once considered novelty setups, nanos are now commonplace at every aquarium show, every local fish store and have a following of diehard fans all their own. In fact, hardy, easy-to-breed marine animals and user-friendly, inexpensive-to-purchase and -maintain nanos have transformed and are giving new life to the aquarium hobby as a whole.

Parents are Key

By making fishes like Nemo and Dory (a regal tang) household names, the film has also created a whole new generation of budding aquarists. Of course, how a fish fares once it is brought home and placed in a nano aquarium falls squarely on the shoulders of mom and dad. Aquariums and the animals kept within them provide parental units with plenty of teachable moments for the future aquarists, ichthyologists, marine biologists, conservationists or aquarium businesspeople in their midst – they just need to drop the remote and take advantage of such opportunities as they present themselves.

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