

## Do Suckermouth Cats Breath Out Of Water?

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*By Ginny Eckstein*

Q. I have been reading Aquarium Fish International magazine for more than six months and I love it! Because your magazine is loaded with great (and helpful) information, maybe you can answer my bizarre question. One night I was watching a fish show on the Discovery Channel, and a guy on the program actually took his plecostomus (I do not know what species) out of the aquarium, with his hands, and said that the plecostomus could breathe atmospheric air for about one hour. Now, I would like to know if this is true or not, and if so, how can the plecostomus do it?

A. I'm glad you love AFI, and I hope I can help you with your "bizarre" question. Actually, we must have comparable tastes in television programs because I believe I was watching the same show you were!

Recently, the Discovery Channel featured an English documentary, Fish People. The introduction informed the viewer that it was about fish, the passion of the people who choose to keep them — more than 5 million in Britain — and the pleasures of fishkeeping, from the diversity of exotic species to how people pick fish that suit their personalities.

The "guy" you refer to is David Sands, known to hobbyists as the author of *Catfishes of the World*, *A Fishkeeper's Guide to South American Catfishes* and *A Fishkeeper's Guide to African and Asian Catfishes*. The pleco he's seen holding out of the water is a *Pterygoplichthys gibbiceps*. Although I wouldn't make any guesses as to the length of time out of water, many plecocos swallow air and hold it in their intestine. I believe this is known as gut aerial respiration.

I believe David Sands was just trying to show how incredible catfish can be. I certainly don't suggest experimenting with any of your plecocos as to how long they can survive out of water. Enjoy them in your aquarium — they are meant to thrive in water.