



Amazon Research Center For Ornamental Fishes

ARCOF

Fall 2024 NEWSLETTER

The Aquarium of the Amazon

On January 29, 2024, at 9 AM Peruvian time, we proudly held the opening ceremonies for the Aquarium of the Amazon, marking an exhilarating milestone. The event brought together a diverse group of dignitaries, including representatives from local and state governments, key figures from the tourism industry, members of the Instituto de Investigaciones de la Amazonía Peruana (IIAP), and members of the press, along with local business leaders. The celebration featured a formal ribbon-cutting ceremony and a blessing, symbolizing the start of a new chapter for ARCOF and the region. Afterward, guided tours were offered to all guests, including the residents of 31 de Mayo, the village that is home to both the research center and the aquarium, allowing them to explore the facilities and learn about its mission firsthand.

The Aquarium of the Amazon, the first public aquarium in this region of the Peruvian Amazon, was established as a center for education and conservation. It offers visitors a unique opportunity to explore and understand the vital role of aquatic life in maintaining the balance of this diverse ecosystem. Each guided tour provides more

than just a look at the fish; guides share insights into how each species contributes to the ecosystem and why their conservation is essential.



All visitors are encouraged to ask questions and engage with specific exhibits. These exhibits include participating in the semi-circular feeding tank, where they can interact with catfish and Pacu, observing the fascinating marine exhibit and sting ray tank or stepping into the nocturnal fish room to discover species that are active only at night. The tour concludes at the "Environmental Wall" exhibit, which sheds light on the four major threats facing the Peruvian Amazon: oil

exploitation, mining, deforestation due to agriculture, and improper waste disposal. Visitors to the Aquarium of the Amazon can also enjoy documentary and educational videos in the outdoor auditorium, where seating options include tables for dining and benches for a more relaxed viewing experience.



Environmental Wall



Nocturnal Fish Room



Outdoor Auditorium

None of this would have been possible without the steadfast support of the research center's dedicated supporters, whose ongoing commitment made the dream of the aquarium a reality. We are deeply grateful for your contributions, which help us provide a meaningful experience that inspires a greater understanding of the region's biodiversity and the pressing need for its preservation.

If you would like to see more pictures of the Aquarium of the Amazon please [click here](#) and you will be taken to the Aquarium page on our website.

We're also excited to introduce a new program called "Adopt a Tank," giving our supporters a chance to get more involved with the Aquarium of the Amazon. Fourteen of our most popular exhibits have been selected for adoption, allowing you to choose an exhibit to support. Your support will be used for tank maintenance, feeding and care of the animals, equipment upkeep and more. As a thank you, your name will be displayed on a plaque at the exhibit in the aquarium. To learn more about the Adopt a Tank program please [click here](#).

Lastly, we're excited to share with all our followers that the Aquarium of the Amazon was recently recognized as the "Best and Most Modern Facility" for tourists visiting Iquitos by the Peruvian Bureau of Tourism. We were truly surprised and deeply honored to receive this recognition!



Conservation Education

Education lies at the core of our mission and is essential for implementing effective conservation measures in the Peruvian Amazon. With the opening of the Aquarium of the Amazon we have been able to reach more children than ever before. By September 30, 2024, we had welcomed over 1,600 primary and secondary school students, including students from the local school for the deaf, along with 170 university students and 52 scouts. Our educational program is designed to inspire conservation and environmental awareness in a fun and engaging way. Each visit kicks off with age-appropriate videos introducing key environmental topics, followed by interactive team activities that get everyone involved. The kids' excitement is contagious as they cheer on their teams, often with the outcome being decided by the slimmest of margins!



Galaxy S20 FE 5G



Afterward, the students take a hands-on tour of the aquarium, where they explore the exhibits up close and learn about the essential roles that aquatic species play in the ecosystem. The feedback from instructors and parents has been overwhelmingly positive, with many praising the program's impact on the children.

To reinforce the lessons learned, each child receives a copy of *The Adventures of Nalda and Eduardo*, an activity book featuring Nalda, our beloved mascot. Through Nalda's adventures, children discover how everyone, regardless of age, can contribute to protecting the environment. This comprehensive approach not only enriches their understanding but also empowers them to take meaningful action for the future of the Amazon.

In addition to working closely with schools across Iquitos, we took part in the regional science fair at the end of May. We also welcomed two Scout Troops to the Aquarium, where the scouts had the opportunity to earn their environmental badges. Participation in these types of events allows us to become more recognized within the community. The science fairs give us a great chance to connect with older students through interactive displays and small group discussions, diving deeper into important environmental topics.

By working together with scout leaders, we make sure our programs support the troop's goals and add extra value to their learning experience. During their visits, scouts split into smaller groups to explore the aquarium through hands-on, interactive tours, making their learning both fun and meaningful.

We continue to collaborate closely with individual fishermen groups and larger fishermen associations. This past summer, Carlos Chuquipiondo was invited to speak at a regional conference focused on fish husbandry for wild-caught fish before export. The event was well attended, and Carlos stayed afterward to meet with

many fishermen, answering their questions and offering ongoing support. He is also working closely with the Belen Fishers Association to develop a sustainable program for wild-caught fish, with the goal of presenting it to the Peruvian government to request financial aid.



Anthony Mazeroll, PhD, continues to be an active voice in international aquaculture. In November 2023, he presented at the 11th International Fisheries Symposium in Taiwan and will be speaking at the 8th International Conference on Aquaculture And Marine Biology, Bhubaneswar, India, in October 2024. Dr. Mazeroll is also a frequent invited speaker at aquarium associations across the U.S., where he shares insights on "Sustainable Breeding of Ornamental Fishes in the Peruvian

Amazon: Helping to Reduce the Impact of Wild-Caught Species" and highlights ARCOF's conservation efforts within the region.



Conservation Projects

- **The Red Pencil Fish (*Nannostomus mortenthaleri*)** – Unfortunately we were not selected by the Segre Foundation as one of the grant recipients for 2024. None the less we are continuing to work with the Red Pencil Fish with a focus on establishing an "insurance population" at the research center. This project has proven to be challenging as much of the control population was lost due to an unknown

bacterial infection and the 6 groupings of male/female pairs have yet to reproduce in captivity. This does not mean we are giving up, quite the opposite. We dug new aquaculture ponds this past summer and over the fall and winter we let them mature. In February 2025 when we are back in Peru the plan is to introduce a large group of red pencil fish to an aquaculture pond that has been created to mimic the flood forest floor and to monitor the population and health of these fish over a 6-month period.

- **Tigrinus Catfish (*Brachyplatystoma tigrinum*)** – We have had some significant challenges with this fish. True to its reputation, this is a difficult fish to raise. Unfortunately, as we approached the end of our second year with this fish, we lost our population of fish due to an unusually large rainfall that caused some flooding of the aquaculture ponds resulting in contamination of the water. This was a difficult pill to swallow, but in research, negative outcomes are also of value.
- **Aristogramma pantalone** also known as the Pantaloons cichlid – Our work with the Aristogramma stalled with the heavy rainfalls in the spring of this year. That said, we are continuing to move this project forward with new ponds that have been cleaned and drained and are now undergoing appropriate conditioning.
- **Anablepsoides speciosus** - Over the summer of 2024 initial population surveys were completed utilizing visual counts as well as eDNA to help determine the population of the Anablepsoides speciosus. Currently Anablepsoides speciosus is red listed by the IUCN, however, there exists some evidence that the distribution of this fish is much larger than originally described. The eDNA data will help provide a better understanding of this species range and population density.
- **Corydoras and Microglanis catfish** – Dr. Eric Thomas from the University of the Pacific spent the month of August at the research center continuing his research on self-poisoning in Corydoras catfish under stress.

Other Highlights

This past summer, ARCOF had the pleasure of hosting documentary and conservation photographer Bruce Farnsworth. Bruce is currently working on a project in South America that includes the conservation efforts of the Amazon Research Center for Ornamental Fishes. His work has been featured in publications such as National Geographic, the Smithsonian, Outdoor Photographer, The Nature Conservancy, and many others.

Several students from the Universidad Nacional de la Amazonía Peruana (UNAP) had the opportunity to collaborate with Bruce, and they found the experience highly rewarding. It was eye-opening for them to witness firsthand the dedication and effort required to capture a truly great photograph.



Volunteers and Interns

We're excited to announce that we accept applications for volunteers and interns year-round! We've hosted many student interns, including those from the Universidad Nacional de la Amazonía Peruana (UNAP), and are always looking for enthusiastic individuals to join our team.

Volunteers and interns must be 18 years or older. Accommodation is provided in double or triple occupancy dormitories, each with its own bathroom featuring hot and cold running water. The facility also has laundry services available, and meals are included. Please note that dormitory space is limited, so the number of available spots for volunteers and interns varies depending on housing availability.

If you're interested in volunteering or doing an internship at the research center, visit our website at amazonresearchcenter.org. Click on the "Get Involved" tab and select "Volunteer/Intern." Then, scroll down to



find the "Complete Form" button. For more information, you can also contact Dr. Anthony Mazerolle directly at amaze@amazonresearchcenter.org.

For those under 18, an adult must accompany you, and approval is required. Please reach out to us directly for further details.

2025 Raffle

We are thrilled to announce that we will be hosting our third annual raffle for a trip for two to the research center, located just outside Iquitos in the heart of the Peruvian Amazon, in March 2025. The lucky winner will receive \$2,000 towards airfare, along with complimentary housing and meals, and transportation to and from the Iquitos airport. During the week-long stay, the winner will also enjoy special excursions to the Manatee Rescue Center and Amazon Forever.

To give flexibility in planning, the winner will have 18 months to schedule the trip. Stay tuned for more details in February 2025, and don't miss your chance to enter this incredible opportunity!

Special Thank You

We would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to two outstanding organizations, the Reptilian National Expo and Skipper's Aquariums, for their incredible support of the Amazon Research Center for Ornamental Fishes (ARCOF). Through auctions held in September and October, each organization raised \$2,000 for our cause, and we are deeply appreciative of their generosity.

The funds raised by the Reptilian National Expo will be directed toward the maintenance of our large wall tank, which showcases the impressive predator fish species native to the Amazon River system. This exhibit plays a vital role in educating visitors about the ecological dynamics of these powerful fish and their significance in the Amazon's aquatic ecosystems.



Meanwhile, the contribution from Skipper's Aquariums will help cover the costs of our annual Christmas party for the children in the village where ARCOF and the Aquarium of the Amazon are located. This event is a cherished tradition, bringing joy to local children during the holiday season and reinforcing our commitment to community engagement and education.

We are immensely grateful to both organizations for their generous contributions and continued support of our mission to protect and conserve the Amazon's extraordinary biodiversity.

Ways You Can Help

The Amazon Research Center for Ornamental Fishes is a nonprofit 501(c)3 organization. As such we rely on the goodwill of our followers to help with the expenses of running the center. Please consider any of the following as ways to support ARCOF.

- **Donate** directly to ARCOF by [clicking here](#)
- **Sponsor** an exhibit through the **Adopt a Tank** program by [clicking here](#).
- **Become** a volunteer by [clicking here](#).
- **Check out** our online store at <https://www.amazonresearchcenter.org/shop>

