

Quest for Gold

by Dave Mandley

As the summer Olympics come to an end, it's time to talk about the quest for gold in goldfish. The story starts a number of years ago, when Al Thomma visited England and witnessed a yellow common goldfish become Best in Show. Al was so impressed with the color and form that he thought long and hard about the worth of this fish.

Upon returning to America, Al made arrangements to procure these fish for our breeding projects. Al has a good eye for introducing new color and scale types to existing breeding programs. With the help of an American fish farm and Tisbury in England, the fish were soon sent to the U.S. with a nice assortment of Bristol Shubunkins. Al heard me mention that Tisbury had a selection of Mock Metallics, and asked that I secure some of these fish as well, remarking "They must be Blue Bellies!" With the yellow metallic and the Mock Metallic on the way to the U.S., Al was responsible for acquiring probably the two most significant fish for my breeding program.

Once they arrived from England, the yellows went to the fish farm and the owner sent three of the fish, along with the Bristols to me. Al took the yellows home with three Mock Metallics, bred the yellows, and distributed them to a number of amateur breeders. The farm lost all of their fish, so Al became the only source for these fish in the U.S. For a number of years the recipients of the yellows didn't have much luck in getting them to breed.

I had one white fish left and Gary Hater had one yellow fish. Gary sent the yellow fish to me, and I received a yellow fish from Italy via John Parker. The fish from Italy turned out to be yellow-orange blue bellies. Al didn't think that these fish exhibited the characteristics of a truly "yellow" fish, so I crossed them to lemon Metallics. Al believed that this crossing would result in an improved gene pool and coloration, and as it turns out, he was correct. The crossing led to the yellow fish that we see today. One of Al's rules for establishing genetic lines was that there should be redundant sources for the gene pool, so that the line could be preserved in case of unexpected disasters. As it turns out, this philosophy held true for the yellow fish, as well as the veiltails that he, Al Foster and John Parker brought back from near-extinction several years earlier. Al was also instrumental in preserving the Blue Phoenix line in the west, once again thanks to his principle of redundant gene pools.

Al saw the merit in working with the yellow coloration in goldfish, and as a result, there are several distinct forms of yellow fish in existence: three varieties of yellow common goldfish, the lemon yellow, the yellow Blue Belly, and the yellow Mock Metallic form. Al was also instrumental in helping adapt the Mock Metallic trait into Bristol Shubunkins, and this proved to be a building block in developing other strains of coloration in Bristol Shubunkins.

Al continues in his work documenting the genetic make-up of the Blue Belly and Mock Metallic color and scalation strains. I am working on documenting the development of the various strains of yellow goldfish in existence today, and look forward to receiving Al's help in this work.

Al is currently ill with pneumonia, but is hopeful that he and I can continue our work in documenting the genetics involved in these fish. We have worked together for many years on producing new goldfish strains and colors. I know that I speak for everyone in the AGA, when I salute Al for his work, and wish him a speedy recovery.