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Frag Swaps - a beginner's guide.

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There has been a dramatic increase in the number of new reef aquarium hobbyists in the past few years. This increase has led to a swelling in the number of local "frag swaps" being held in communities across the country. Frag swaps are events typically sponsored by a local aquarium society during which hobbyists will buy, sell, and trade captive grown fragments (frags) of corals, as well as new and used equipment. This article will tell you all you need to know if you will be going to your first swap.

Preparing to attend

Attending your first swap can be an intimidating experience. I always try to arrange trades or purchases in advance of the swap. You can usually find a thread in one of the online boards or on the sponsoring clubs website in which advance trades and sales are arranged. Scan these frequently in the days leading up to the swap. You can also post on these threads with any specific species you are looking to buy or trade for. Remember to arrange a time and/or a place to meet the seller at the swap, as usually it is someone you don't know. Most swaps issue name tags at the door, but I have found it best to let the seller know that I'll be wearing a bright red shirt, or some other way to distinguish myself to make locating each other easier.

Possible Fees

There is usually a small fee to attend swaps, and another small fee if you want to set up an aquarium to sell or trade frags from. You will probably not have anything to trade if you are new to the hobby, which means you should bring cash with you. 90% of the people who are selling things will only accept cash, although there will usually be some vendors there taking credit cards. Check with the sponsoring club ahead of time to find out which, if any, vendors will be attending and what forms of payment will be accepted. Usually, these events are held in venues that are a little too small for the numbers of attendees, which will mean some waiting around while the crowd goes from table to table examining the offerings. You should attempt to see all of the offerings before

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Photo by Bob Fenner

An adult (*Gomphosus varius*); the Common Bird Wrasse

The Bird Wrasses, Genus *Gomphosus*

Bob Fenner
WetWebMedia

Almost constantly soaring about like their avian counterparts the brilliantly colored bird wrasses are amusingly shaped, and are on a sharp-eyed look-out for food items, predators, and aquarists.

Bird Wrasses so named for their prominent physical beaks as much as their flitting swimming behavior. These are fast moving, moderate sized (males to about a foot) fishes that do very well in mixed fish species systems.

There are two species in the genus but depending on the geographic location of the aquarist there is little awareness of the other by species. Europeans are readily familiar with The Indian Ocean and Red Sea species *Gomphosus caeruleus* which is almost exclusively traded in European markets. But Americans will only know *G. varius* which is found from Hawaii to the tropical western Pacific and eastern Indian Ocean.

Both these species attain about the same size, have similar habits and care requirements. Bird Wrasses are neither small, nor greatly easygoing, and are best kept with

other mid-sized fishes of an outgoing nature. Small fishes, or ones that are too shy to compete for food, and "bite-sized" invertebrates like small shrimps cannot be easily kept with *Gomphosus* spp.

The Two Species

Gomphosus caeruleus (Lacepede 1801), the Blue, or Red Sea Bird Wrasse (Photo 1) is found in the Indian Ocean and Red Sea. Males are dark azure blue, and females white to yellow below and dark greenish blue above. They reach about one foot (30 cm) in length.

Gomphosus varius (Lacepede 1801), is the much more common Bird Wrasse in the west. The males are lighter green over-all, and females transversely white to black front to back, with an orangish upper "beak". The common Bird Wrasse is found in Hawaii to the tropical western Pacific and eastern Indian Ocean.

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