



PondScapes Atlanta



SICK FISH: Part2: Parasites

Sick fish can be a difficult problem to solve. Lots of variables can make it difficult to sort out the root of the problem. To make things worse, once parasites gain a foothold, they very rarely go away on their own; at least not without major fish losses.

We will present a variety of scenarios and solutions, ALL are assuming that water quality is perfect and other stress factors are removed, and will remain so (see Sick Fish: Part 1).

Costia and Trichodina:

Probably the most common parasite problem in the average pond is Costia and Trichodina. These parasites are often seen together. From here on we'll refer to these parasites as 'C&T'. For starters, ninety percent of the fishes we see with parasite problems have C&T. These guys are present in probably every pond in Atlanta. They usually only become a problem when something suppresses the innate immune system of the fish. Usually this is due to overcrowding, inadequate filtration, or very commonly, spring thaw.

Costia and Trichodina are microscopic parasites that basically suck on the fish's slime coat, skin and bodily juices. Separately these guys aren't usually so bad (particularly trichodina), but working together they pack a wallop. Luckily C&T infested fish show some pretty convincing signs of stress that even the amateur fish keeper can see. Things like jumping out of the water, listlessness, a whitish coating, split fins, and poor appetite are very common. Think about it, if you had a major case of fleas sucking your blood how would you feel? Thankfully these parasites don't usually lead to a secondary bacterial infection like the next bad-guys so often do.

Flukes:

Another particularly bad parasite group are flukes. These guys are a little larger than C&T and can be much more deadly. Usually flukes don't kill the fish outright, they cause skin abrasions that lead to bacterial infections, most commonly large ulcers. Flukes are similar to C&T in that they attach to the skin of the fish. But flukes also love to get at the wonderfully juicy fish gills too. Fluke infested fish show many of the same symptoms as our C&T infested fish do (often all three are present). The major difference is the 'ulcer disease' you commonly see. What happens is the flukes open up a hole in the fish's skin that bacteria get into. The hole gets enlarged and septic. We see a fish with round lesions on its side, scales falling off and possibly even flared out gill covers. This is almost certainly flukes and a bacterial infection, and very serious.

Thankfully, most other parasite and bacteria problems are minor, and uncommon. More often than not if another type of problem emerges its from an outside influence (herons, turtles, pH, kids throwing rocks). And thankfully almost all of the affected fish can be saved if we act quickly.

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