

Naturfreunde für Aquarien- und Terrarienkunde im 20. Bezirk e. V.



An ornamental fish exchange in Berlin,,reloaded"

It's over 40 years since my local pet shop owner recommended an aquarium club in the Rehberge-Klaus in Wedding to me, and I never would have thought that this relationship would have lasted so long.

After a brief introduction, I joined. The club had a monthly ornamental fish exchange, which had been held since the 1950s. While the venues may have changed over time, the exchange and the club evenings were always part of the experience. Then the coronavirus pandemic hit, and suddenly everything was different: no more meetings, no more exchanges. That was a hard blow. Many older members gave up breeding because they no longer saw any prospects.

After a few months, restrictions were eased, but with strict distancing rules. In our location at that time, we could only have accommodated five vendors and eight visitors—so no market. The next annual general meeting was scheduled for January 2023, and we were looking for a larger space that would also accommodate the exchange. Finally, we found the old club premises again- after five changes in ownership. Unfortunately, the new owners weren't familiar with an ornamental fish market. But after some explanation, they agreed—so long as the the coronavirus restrictions had first been lifted.

In the summer of 2022, the time had come for us to rebuild the market. We took care of permits, obtained the necessary information from the veterinary office, and signed a care contract with a veterinarian. Everything was prepared, and we started optimistically into January 2023 – the first market after the coronavirus pandemic, after more than 30 months pause. We ran an ad and thought that many aquarists would still be waiting keenly for an exchange.

Despite many vendors, the 2023 fair didn't run quite smoothly. Visitor numbers fell short of expectations, and those who did come didn't stay long. Instead of engaging in in-depth discussions, people rushed in, made a quick purchase, and then disappeared again. This was frustrating. And the financial and logistical problems also became apparent. Fewer visitors meant fewer vendors, and this continued to decline. The big question for the committee was: can a club even continue to exist without an exchange? We held several special meetings on this topic and finally, we unanimously decided that it should come to an end following the December 2023 event.

A short time after, I received a call from a club member informing me that the Spandau Exchange was also considering closing at the end of the year. At first, I thought that couldn't be true. The Anubias Exchange was always a huge success, much bigger than ours. I contacted the chairman, Peter Hölterhoff, and he sadly confirmed that it, too, was facing closure.

Over the next few weeks, I spent a lot of time thinking and examining the figures from the Anubias

exchange from the post-coronavirus era to determine whether exchanges even have a future. Berlin is large, but the aquarium scene has somehow shrunk. There are hardly any pet shops any more, and those that exist are often just departments in diy markets or garden centres.

It soon became clear that we would need significantly more help for the exchange in Spandau than our previous five volunteers. A positive aspect was that, starting in October 2023, we were able to set everything up in Spandau the day before – the helpers quickly got up to speed.

Talks with the facility management went well, and we were fortunate to have an aquarist as our contact. This allowed us to keep the rent stable for the new year.

After all discussions were concluded and the costs for 2024 were determined, we decided to continue operating the Anubias Exchange in Spandau— but now under the management of our 20. Bezirk club. For us, this was not just a financial decision, but also an opportunity to save the exchange.

Thanks to the support of many committee members and their knowledge of the structure and operations of the exchange, we were able to make a smooth transition.

And now, almost a year later, I can say: The Spandau Exchange has been a success. Most visitors never considered that it might be no more. At the end of 2023/beginning of 2024, many were concerned when they heard that the exchange was in jeopardy. "How? No more exchange? Why? Where then?" were the most common reactions. When a fish exchange has existed for so long, people almost take it for granted.

I would like to thank all those who helped and supported us in continuing the Spandau Fish Exchange.

Text and photos: Andreas Kersjes

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