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**FORMATION AND
ORGANISATION OF
AN
AQUARIST SOCIETY**

BOOKLET No 8

FEDERATION of BRITISH AQUATIC SOCIETIES

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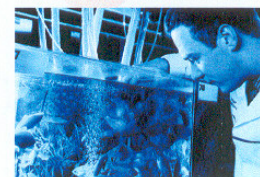
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FOREWORD

The least of Society members' worries seems to be how their Society actually came into existence, in which case there should be little need for this Guide. But why produce such a Guide at all?

Like other hobbies, fishkeeping has to compete with all other life's modern attractions. The IT age has made access to information so much more convenient, to say nothing of the temptation of computer games to lure youngsters. Nevertheless there is proliferation of aquatic retail outlets that attract thousands of people each weekend, the majority of whom have little inkling of the organised hobby.

With government taking more and more steps to control pet keeping, it is the aquatic Societies' voices that will be needed to combat the threat to the hobby. If people want to join an aquatic Society and there is not one in their locality, what are they to do? The guidance and suggestions in this Booklet will help them do something to get a local Society up and running.

The revised edition of this Booklet is in two, parts - the first gives ideas on establishing a new Society: where to meet, publicity, fund-raising etc. The second part looks at the actual day to day running of the Society; meeting-to-meeting duties of Officers and Committee are detailed.

The Federation is extremely indebted to **Stan Forrest**, of **St Edmundsbury Aquarist Society**, for providing the original text; not only anticipating the questions but also coming up with the answers to enable a new Society to function smoothly, both right at the start and into a very successful future.

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Forming a Society - page 2

PART 1



Forming a Society - page 3

INTRODUCTION

If, after reading through this guide, you decide to form a Society (and we hope you will!) take heed of a small word of warning.

It is impossible to lay down a strict set of Rules to suit all situations.

Within a smooth-running Society, some things will prove to be more important than others, with other actions being modified to suit the occasion.

None of the suggestions in this Guide are to be slavishly adhered to without question; examine each one on their individual merits as to how they may be used to benefit your Society's needs and circumstances.

Whilst any new Society will, in time, expand its contacts with others and become part of the National Federation, each individual Society is (and should be) completely autonomous, often having problems peculiar to itself which require solutions worked out to the exclusion of others.

Stick to a system that works for your Society - changing for changing's sake will all too often destroy an otherwise smoothly-running operation.

The strength of any Society lies collectively within its members; one doesn't need to be a Committee member to contribute to the success of the Society; the most efficient Committee will be lost unless it has the continuing support of those it strives to serve.

Primarily written for about-to-be-formed, or very new Societies, this Booklet will also help existing Societies towards continuing growth and success.

It is not our intention to point out where you may be going wrong, but to show the best methods of getting things right!

The first section of this Guide assumes that there is no Society activity in your area but, undismayed, you've decided to form a new Society.

The first problem is how to find other fishkeepers who might be interested in getting together on a regular basis - the where, when and how problems come later!



Finding Other Fishkeepers ...

Just because there isn't a Society in your area it doesn't mean there aren't any fishkeepers either; there will always be people nearby who keep fish. They may take the aquatic magazines, they may have friends who keep fish, but have never thought about getting together and sharing this common interest. It may be a slow process but eventually someone somewhere can be contacted with a view to getting things going. Asking your **newsagent** if anyone has a regular order for fish magazines is one easy thing to try.

Where to Look?

The most likely place is, of course, the local **aquatic retailer** but don't overlook other less fish-orientated places.

If your **pub** has a community tanks in its Lounge then hang about near it and keep an ear open for other interested customers who may have tanks of their own (the research involved provides a good excuse for a pub crawl!).

The next time you have to go to the **dentist**, that relaxing (?) aquarium in the waiting room may well give rise to fishkeeping conversation between fellow sufferers.

Fishkeepers (and would be fishkeepers) are often regular visitors to the **Library**. Ask the librarian to pass the word on to other fish book borrowers.

Alternatively, you could display a notice on the library information board (most **D-I-Y Superstores** have Mutual Help Noticeboards too).

Ask your **local Vet** if he knows of fishkeepers in the area, again a small notice in the surgery could bring more contacts.

'Exploring every Avenue' could be taken literally. During a casual walk around your neighbourhood you might see illuminated tanks through windows, and a knock on the door could bring dividends.

Putting a small advertisement in the **Local Free Press**, postcards in the **Petshop** and **Corner Shop** windows will all help attract other fishkeepers' attention.

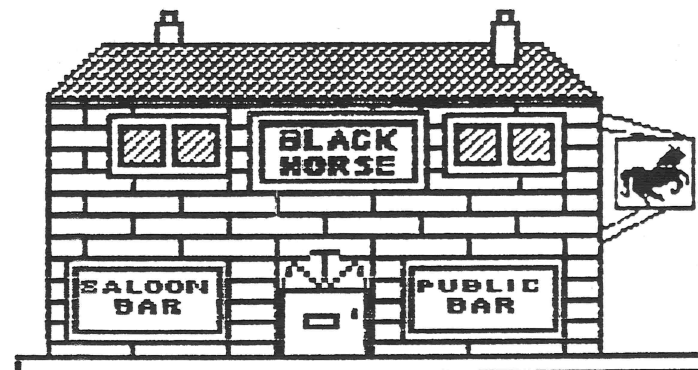
If your town has a **Public Zoo**, or **Animal Park** then here are other sites where contact with potential members might be made. Make enquiries at the **Town Hall**: the Amenities Officer will be glad to add your Society's name to the list of local events; there may even have been previous enquiries along the same lines as your own.

Reverting to the most obvious - **the local aquatic shop** - find out what other customers feel about forming a Society. The owner will usually welcome the idea because besides just selling 'bread and butter' species the range of fish stocks could be extended to cater for the growing number of more discerning customers. Again, ask if a small notice might be displayed.

When Everything Else Fails ...

If your family like fish as much as you do, then you could have the nucleus of a Society right at home (we take no responsibility for arguments about who's going to be Chairman!).

Once you have made contact with a number of fishkeepers, the time has come to have that first meeting and get things into some kind of organised order.



Where To Meet... ?

Fish need water so any potential meeting places should be looked at with this in mind; the landlord might not relish any of it being spilled on the meeting room's floor! Often many Club rooms are in an upstairs part of the building and carrying water-filled tanks up and down stairs is a highly hazardous business! (What about insurance in the event of accidents?)

Secluded meeting places maybe fine for the locals but visiting Speakers, Judges and new members may find them too much off the beaten track for convenience. On the other hand, a centrally-located, easy to find meeting place might be some distance from the car-park -carrying fish-boxes down the High Street late at night can attract some very strange glances!

Licensed premises although often suitable, have the added disadvantage that there may be difficulties in getting members back from the bar to the Clubroom after refreshment breaks! Such premises may also be thought unsuitable where junior members are concerned.

Halls adjoining churches are quite a commonly-found venue but don't pick choir - practice night for your meetings.

Community Centres may limit you to meeting times so as to fit in with existing activity groups, but a bonus is that your Society's activities will be publicised more widely, as other visitors to the Centre soon get to know that aquarists are present in the area. Very often, Centres organise annual exhibitions of displays by its tenant organisations, again another welcome publicity opportunity.

Schools and **Evening Institutes** may be useful, although meetings may then be restricted to school term-times, with a mandatory 'recess' during the summer.

One very important factor when seeking accommodation, is **RENT**.

Community Centre rents vary enormously and often the Society is expected to affiliate to the Community Association as well (another outlay). Meeting under an 'educational' roof may entitle you to **subsidised** rent or a grant towards operating costs; check to see what you need to do in order to qualify.

Pub rents also vary, with some landlords allowing for money made from sales!

It is vital to find a permanent meeting place; once venues become uncertain members soon lose touch and the Society's future life is usually doomed

When to Meet....?

Although some Societies meet weekly, the general frequency is usually monthly or twice monthly with the latter arrangement often being alternate weeks rather than "1st & 3rd Mondays" or "2nd & 4th Thursdays" in each month.

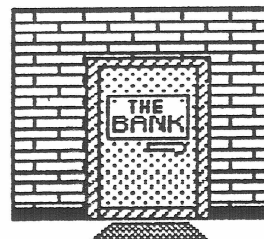
Faced with programme-arranging, you might well opt for monthly rather than fortnightly meetings. A lot depends too on the location of your Society: if you are near other Societies, or within the service area of one of the larger aquatic organisations, you will find it much easier to fill your programme calendar.

One drawback with monthly meetings is that it is very easy to lose the 'Club Night' habit - even when only one meeting is missed - if meetings are spaced too far apart. Frequency of meetings also depends on the availability of premises and on sufficient finances to pay 'high-frequency' rent.

Bear in mind, especially if you hope to attract junior members, problems caused by **Homework, Scouts, Guides, Choir Practice, Youth Clubs** (it's a good idea to study meeting times of such groups when planning to set up a Society)

The meeting's starting time shouldn't be too early especially if members have to get home from work first, in order to catch fish for Table Shows: on the other hand, a late starting time will mean that juniors might not be able to stay for the whole meeting unless their parents can be relied on to pick them up.

Fridays might not be popular with some members, who like to get away at weekends, nor with those preparing for weekend Fish Shows. Some families still have a regular 'shopping' evening - even favourite tv programmes have a habit of interrupting Club night routines! One cannot please all the people all the time.



A problem which causes headaches to any new Society -the all-important subject **FINANCE**, especially how to generate income.

Don't embark on ambitious programmes which may cause trouble when it comes to costing. Base the first few meetings on a series of 'get-togethers.' The main draw on finances during the early stages will be room hire charges. This gives the Society time to get a rough estimate of what might be needed in the year ahead in terms of entertainment and financial outgoings.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Most Societies operate **yearly subscription** schemes for individual members, couples families juniors and Senior Citizens. Paid in advance, these give the Treasurer cash to work with and, as membership grows, extra income will be even more welcome. Hopefully, financial matters should always balance out on the side of profit and extra ways of fund-raising should be examined.

SHOWS / COVENTIONS / EXHIBITIONS

New Societies may see Shows as a way of attracting revenue; unfortunately they require a very heavy **outlay** of capital and should be regarded very cautiously. It is better for the Society to become firmly established before venturing into the Show scene. Conventions are also best avoided until a 'fish-interested' atmosphere has been well and truly created in your district.

Ask **neighbouring Societies** about experiences with Shows: you will need to arrange your events not to clash with their attractions. The **National organising body** has full information about events likely to be in your area (see page 34). On the other hand, a small-budgeted Exhibition of your Society's activities (and fishes) may do much to bring in new members

RAFFLES/REFRESHMENTS

Raffles provide the thrill of 'having a flutter' at each meeting (prizes needn't be extravagant), and the income will help offset, say, postage and stationery bills. (Pay for refreshments at the time rather than impose on any good lady).

Meeting The Costs...

TABLE SHOWS

It is not unusual to levy a small entry fee for Table Show. Whilst not exactly bringing in large amounts, every little helps to defray costs of Award Cards.

AUCTIONS

Encourage members to dispose of their surplus fish, plants and equipment through an auction. **Ensure a strict code of practice when auctioning fish**, so as to comply with likely Animal Welfare requirements of the future.

A small percentage of prices paid is taken by the Society, and the keen bidding adds excitement and entertainment to the evening and bumps up the prices! Include neighbouring Societies in larger **BRING & BUY** evenings once the Society gets established.

LIBRARY

The Society should set up a collection of books for hire to members at a modest cost. Experienced members may have books they are willing to donate to the library to get things started. The hiring charge (including fines for late returns?) can help towards defray restocking costs of newer titles. Some publishers will sell their monthly hobby magazines in bulk at discount terms for later re-sale to your members.

CLUB SHOP

On the face of it, a Club Shop is a good idea - at Open Shows it can be an attraction to visitors but unless it is run methodically (and well-supported) it can prove to be a liability.

Accurate records of transactions need to be kept, a very necessary job if things are to be kept running smoothly. Purchasing goods regularly through Mail Order or Internet is a good idea as is buying fish food in quantity and re-bagging it (in smaller quantities) for resale to members. A local trader may even be persuaded to supply bulk goods to the Society at discount prices.

All the above ideas are not guaranteed to fill Society coffers overnight but each in its own way can help to make ends meet when things get a bit tight!



Although the previous section looked at ways of swelling the accounts, the true lifeblood of the Society is not money but members. However, it is the way that any new Society goes about establishing itself that increases the likelihood of it remaining Vigorous and flourishing at the end of each year.

There are many simple but effective ways of getting your Society known and on the right road to success. Complicated fund-raising schemes often obscure the true aim of the Society (fishkeeping) by concentrating too much on the money itself. Here are some simple advertising options open to most Societies.

THE PRESS

Your local Press is often short of 'copy'. Send in a report of all your Society's activities regularly. If the paper's Editor can rely on regular information the chances are that a lot of space may come your way. The Editor may come back to you for advice on fishkeeping, but in the meantime any exposure in print is good for your Society (always include the meeting place, time and date details, or the Secretary's name and telephone number.)

Invite the Press to your main events of the year, Shows, Prize-giving, Social Events, Pond Hunts etc (especially if a local dignitary is to be present as Guest of Honour.)

The previous comments also apply to material submitted to the monthly hobby magazines, but this material can be more specialised. Remember, periodicals have a much earlier 'deadline' than weekly newspapers: any publicity must be submitted well-in-advance, usually at least two months before publication.

If you produce regular Newsletter for members, apart from sending it to local papers or periodicals, exchange it with other 'publishing' Societies, even those overseas; these days use the Internet to email pdf formats of your magazine – it saves a lot of postage!

RADIO

Local Radio is a good outlet for Society news. If the station's regular 'Pet Spot' seems to feature only cats, dogs, hamsters etc why not make contact and offer fishkeeping advice? Keep them advised on Society events -a mention on the morning of the event often brings in visitors, all prospective new members.

POSTERS

Get some posters made and distribute them in places where people go for information – TOWN HALLS, INFORMATION CENTRES, LIBRARIES, VETS' WAITING ROOMS and COMMUNITY CENTRES. Attract more specialist attention at Pet Shops, Garden Centres, local Zoos and Safari Parks. In addition to large posters, small printed handouts can displayed in a 'Please Take One' type container. Many shopkeepers may accept such displays.

SCHOOLS

If you meet in a school, you are in a very good position to develop a good contact with its pupils, especially if you can talk to them during term-time. Many schools have aquariums and staff may welcome a talk on their upkeep.

HOSPITALS

Children's Wards usually have an aquarium, and most Societies are quick to see that by maintaining such tanks (and those in hotel foyers and dentists' waiting rooms too) extra publicity can come their way. A small notice alongside the tank can draw visitors' attention to the fact that there is an active Aquarist Society in the area; you may even get some enquiries about fish problems too.

GENERAL CLUB PUBLICITY

To advertise your newly-formed Society, you will need a Society Badge: these can be obtained quite readily (see Yellow Pages, Thomson's etc for addresses) and can vary from simply having your Society's name engraved on a bar on an existing pattern to designing one of your own. In the latter case, the cost will be considerably more as a die, or pattern, must be made from your design and the badges proper produced from it. (Get the die back from the badge-maker; you will need it for extra supplies, and if you are shopping around for better prices.) Always buy more badges than you need right away -your membership will grow and the more you order the cheaper the unit price. Before plunging into production, do get several estimates.

You should also make sure that other interested parties know of your Society's existence. Writing to the hobby magazines with news and reports will alert other Societies in the area to your Society's existence, and avoid a clash of dates when they see you've got something planned for the same day.

Although, as a brand new and inexperienced Society you may feel that affiliating to the National body is a little premature, you should write to the FBAS informing them of your Society's existence even if you are outside the Federation's immediate servicing area. The FBAS receives regular enquiries as to the whereabouts of aquatic Societies; unless your Society's name is on the list potential new member cannot be directed to you: also, by being on the Federation's list, you will receive news and information likely to be beneficial to your Society.

Whilst none of the above actually brings hard cash directly into your Society, any contacts will be from people who may become converted into regular members, to contribute even more to the Society's ongoing success.

USE THE INTERNET

It may be some time before your Society can host its own website, but you should try to get your Society's details included on as many Internet-based data bases of aquatic interest as you can. This will attract would be members, in addition to publicising your existence.



One thing should be borne in mind right from the start: an Aquarist Society is just what the title suggests. Unless it is a Society specialising in one species or aquatic interest, it is concerned with all aspects of the hobby and should never concentrate on one particular feature; its activities should reflect the varied interests of its members. More often than not, Clubs have foundered because members felt that only one aspect had been served. So how to cater for these varied tastes over perhaps long periods?

There is nothing more interest-destroying to members than to be confronted with unprepared sessions; membership will surely soon decline. One way of overcoming this problem is to make sure that at least the next four meetings are organised, with members being told of these programme plans at each meeting. **PROGRAMME PLANNING** is discussed more fully in Part 2.

INEXPENSIVE ENTERTAINMENTS

A ruling factor which governs any programme arrangement is, of course, available cash. This, however, need not detract from a successful night. As we progress through this Section, suggestions for meetings' activities will escalate in cost, but first, some inexpensive 'home-grown' examples.

Most established Societies include programme items such as **Members' Night; Successes & Failures; Tank-making Night; Fresh Discoveries; Problems** etc. These are still of value, even when funds permit much costlier entertainment, because they are enjoyable and constructive, bringing into the open many members who may otherwise shrink from participating in more formally-arranged evenings (not everyone feels confident enough to question a visiting 'expert').

Such evenings are simple to plan - all it needs, for instance, on **Problems** is a subject to be aired, it doesn't even have to be real, a hypothetical one will do just as well (alert Chairmen soon learn to store up such questions for future use). These can well turn out to be 'late-nights' where members linger on rather than miss the outcome of fiercely-argued debates.

'**Success and Failure**' nights are run on similar lines. One member may be overjoyed at a spawning, whilst another member may be just as frustrated because the same species refused to co-operate so willingly for him. The ensuing Club 'post mortem' on both cases again makes good entertainment, with everybody learning something in the process.

For another 'self-catering' evening why not arrange a **Quiz**? There are two **Quiz Books (Booklets 18 & 25)** issued by the Federation of British Aquatic Societies for this very purpose. Questions can be posed in various ways: to the Society as a whole; as a team game; by subject or by random selection. If two or three evenings are used for this purpose a small Trophy could be awarded to the highest-scoring individual or team.

INTER-SOCIETY ACTIVITIES

The competitive team spirit at any **Inter-Club Quiz**, against a neighbouring Society can make for an exciting evening. The only expense incurred being the cost to the host Society for some light refreshments for visitors.

Inter-Club collaboration can be also be mutually (and financially) beneficial for all Societies concerned. For a small Society, the expense of a live Speaker may be beyond its reach, or it may wish to spare the Speaker the embarrassment of a small audience. Sharing the Speaker's expenses with another Society shares the financial burden and guarantees a bigger audience.

Social events (**Barbecues, Bring & Buys, Dances, Christmas Parties** etc) are other good occasions on which to open the doors to other Clubs in the area. On the aquatic side, one topic that does arouse interest is the accounting of trips different Clubs may have made to dealers or other places of aquatic interest; such information may be used to advantage for similar outings for your Society.

SPEAKERS

In the early days, when engaging Speakers, do find out in advance what their fees will be. Most Speakers give their services willingly but sometimes their travel costs can be more than was first anticipated. It is best to try and use those Speakers nearest to you first, for obvious reasons. (**BOOKING SPEAKERS**, and what to do if they cancel unexpectedly, is dealt with in Part 2). Don't be afraid to book Speakers on apparently non-aquatic subjects - for example many Water Board officials give excellent evening talks; ask a local photographer to give a talk or demonstration on fish photography (even if he hasn't tried it yet).

Having obtained a Speaker, there are one or two tips to make the evening run smoothly, and which will get your Society a good name amongst Speakers. Always have someone detailed to greet the Speaker (very important on his first visit); make sure he has any necessary projection equipment at his disposal; if he brings his own he may appreciate a helping hand to get it in from the car. If you meet in a licensed premises, or have access to a tea-bar, a quick refreshing drink, prior to the talk, will also be gratefully received.

Most Societies devote the first part of the meeting to 'Club Business' and then allow the Speaker to start. However, if the visiting Speaker has had some way to travel, it might be more helpful to reverse the sequence of events. Much time can be taken up with questions to the Speaker after the talk but remember this period is eating into his travelling home time: sort out Club Business whilst he is on his way home- but don't forget to settle his expenses before he leaves!

SLIDE SHOWS, VIDEOS AND FILMS

After a Speaker, audio-visual programmes are the next best thing, except for the fact that you can't ask questions. Generally, someone in the Society will have the necessary projector, screen, cassette player, video recorder, portable television and laptop computer. It may also be possible to borrow these from a school, local Education Authority, Camera Society or photographic dealer. Film libraries are hard to find and films may need an experienced projectionist as part of the hiring conditions.

The FBAS has a large library of audio-visual material on **FREE-HIRE** to member Societies (or at reasonable rates to non-member Societies). Its traditional **TAPE/SLIDE SHOWS** are still available but **VHS VIDEOS** are now more popular: **VCD** and **DVD** formats of these FBAS-originated programmes may be purchased by individuals for their own use. (See page 34 for addresses of contacts for FBAS services or go to the FBAS website at <http://www.fbas.co.uk>).

Whatever the source, the two Golden Rules when using hired material are:

- 1. BOOK WELL IN ADVANCE OF THE DATE REQUIRED**
- 2. ALWAYS RETURN WITHOUT DELAY AFTER USE**

TABLE SHOWS

A mainstay of many Society evenings is the exhibiting of fish.

Table Shows (also known as Bow! Shows in the U.S.A.) are excellent opportunities where fishkeeping skills can be demonstrated, although not all members are totally won over to this activity. Here, the answer is educate rather than browbeat. Incidentally, unlike Open Shows, Table Shows are not expensive to run and will not drain the Society's financial resources!

Get members to bring along a selection of fish and then ask a friendly Judge (yes, they can be found!) to explain what qualities are looked for in a fish; often the root cause of the anti-showing lobby is not understanding how fish are evaluated against one another. **FBAS Booklet No 5 (Show Rules)** explains clearly what qualities Judges are looking for when judging not only single fish (Coldwater or Tropical) but Pairs, Breeders Teams, Plants, Furnished Aquaria, Aquascapes or even Ponds. You can take this 'education' a step further by getting members to judge the fish themselves, basing their decisions on what they have learned, and awarding a small prize for the verdict nearest to that of the Judge; having a random selection of differing quality fish on the D-I-Y judging evening makes pointing far easier than if fishes of equal quality had been presented

Another benefit of appreciating what qualities are sought after when judging a fish is that members apply these criteria when next buying fish, with the result that the quality of fish within the Club rises. It is usual for the whole 'range' of species to be catered for at Table Shows over the year Societies soon adapt the Table Show format to include contests for Juniors, 'Knock-out' events, Breeders and for miniature Furnished Aquariums.

If the urge to run a large Show still lingers, an annual Table Show, arranged as a Society Closed Show event (or even an Inter-Club Invitation Show) lets the Society to flex its show-organising muscles, before going for the 'Big One.'

OUTSIDE ACTIVITIES

A very popular annual event is judging members' home Furnished Aquariums or Ponds. This is a good opportunity of finding out how other members organise their fishkeeping at home and, despite what they say at meetings, to see what fish they really keep! If you can possibly manage to cover this activity with a video camera the results can be viewed at a later Society meeting for the benefit of all the members; similarly, a conducted video tour of members' fish-houses will also be well received and expose all the various 'best methods' of keeping fish.

Highly interesting, during summer months, are Pond Hunts: remember to get permission from the local authority before you begin dredging the park pond. Day trips to the coast can shed fresh light on native marine species if a Beachcombing venture is organised. Either of these activities can incorporate 'al fresco' Table Shows of specimens caught. Get any 'anti-showing members' to organise a barbecue (or get the ice-creams) to round off a perfect event.

Coach trips to public aquariums, fish farms, aqualife centres, aquatic dealers outside the Society's immediate area, visits to National Shows or even trips abroad all help to widen the Society's experience.

The organisation of coach trips has to be handled with care: to safeguard the Society's resources (in the event of lack of numbers on the day) the full price should be paid when booking seats

As with Speakers, some common courtesy should be given to the place of interest at the eventual destination: do give the fish farm, dealer etc some idea of how many members are likely to call and approximately at what time.

Many dealers will make sure that they have 'something of interest if they know a reasonably large party is expected: some will also be happy to arrange an evening's visit *too*. When planning a 'fish-buying trip' to the Continent - do make sure the shops are likely to be open (especially on Sundays) and also enquire whether a minimum amount of fish (say a box or two) have to be purchased in order to get a good price. Don't forget to obtain a livestock import licence before you go, otherwise on your return you will be in trouble with H.M. Revenue & Customs!

PART 2



INTRODUCTION

No matter what the hobby interest, 'officials' all seem to share a common problem - it proves impossible to attract as many people, as would be ideal, to share the organising burden.

Imagine this scenario at an inaugural meeting: after invitations for nominations have been issued (and the following few minutes of silence endured) a lone voice pipes up "I'll give it a try." Immediately a sigh of relief rushes around the room, until it is realised that there are other posts to be filled - then the silences return.

Eventually, the most important posts are filled by virtue of vague promises of support (especially from the non-elected).

Filling such Important posts by such a haphazard method is almost downright irresponsible by all concerned and bodes ill for the stable future of the Society.

Then there's always the threat of being 'volunteered' for the job by whom you thought were your friends!

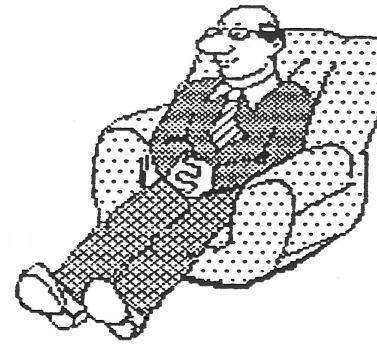
Enthusiasm without experience can be disastrous so, to avoid future problems, always make sure you (or anyone else you'd like to propose for the job) are both capable, and willing, to do it.

In the following pages, we will look at each Officer's post in detail and how it fits in with others.

By taking time to understand each of their functions, you will be better equipped to see if you (or any other person) can best fill any of the posts competently and without clashing of duties.

The resulting coherent working team will benefit all the members of the Society.

Chairman



What constitutes a good Chairman?
There are many desirable qualities and it would be a miracle if they existed in one person.

The Chairman must be in touch with the interests of the members.

He must involve his 'back up team' the Committee - however gifted the Chairman may be, he cannot run the Society single-handed.

There are plenty of good books on public meeting procedures, but Societies are not always sticklers for protocol, nor would we want them to be. Here are two examples of the few (but necessary) things to be observed in order to maintain the smooth-running of meetings.

Start the meeting promptly, particularly so if you have the services of a Speaker or Judge. Apart from being a courtesy, it will eventually ensure that habitual latecomers are brought into line.

The Chairman should maintain firm control of the meeting, without being too dictatorial; don't allow prolonged heated exchanges, either between individual members or two halves of the hall: as soon as there seems to be a clear majority of opinion, 'time' should be called on that particular subject, and a proposal voted upon if necessary.

The secret of good Chairmanship is to mingle and let other people play their part in making Society activity an enjoyable experience. Good manners play an important part in this: a quiet introduction will put the newcomer, visiting Speaker or Judge at their ease. There is no need however to monopolise their company for the rest of the evening, a Committee member can be brought in to carry on and so involve the new face in the evening's activities without undue fuss or ceremony. A nice touch, used by many Chairmen at the end of the meeting, is to thank the members for their presence, give details of the next meeting and wish everyone a safe journey home - after they've helped put the chairs away!

If the Chairman is firm, unbiased and humble enough to admit to mistakes, then you have found the right person for the job,



SECRETARY

To the many who have been Secretary in any organisation, their common lasting impression of the job is that the blame for literally anything that goes adrift is likely to be laid at their door – it's no wonder that this is one of the least sought-after posts!

Despite perhaps occasional delusions of grandeur by the Chairman, the Secretary is the lynchpin of the

Society and the main contact address.

So, a good and reliable mail answering service is the order of the day especially so when booking Speakers and Judges. The taking of Minutes need not require shorthand -brief notes and a good memory plus writing up the notes as soon as possible after the meeting will always see you through.

The reading of Minutes is often thought unnecessary but, as they are a permanent record of the Society's official activities, they become invaluable as an 'argument-settler' in times of disputes.

Booking Speakers and Judges for meetings is fraught with pitfalls.

If your Society is fortunate to be within an active fishkeeping area, book up local Speakers and Judges first to get a cushion of bookings behind you whilst you deal with the more distant ones or non-repliers.

If you send out invitations (with S.A.E.s of course!) to several Speakers, you cannot release those you won't need until one has replied favourably; if several are ready acceptors, book them ahead for future meetings - most Speakers appreciate bookings well in advance; it enables them to plan their year too.

If you intend to have Table Shows, why not have a Speaker on the same evening whose subject includes species on display? Alternatively, have the Speaker at the previous meeting in order to build up interest in the forthcoming Table Show.

Don't book Speakers on subjects at the wrong time of year.

Coldwater topics are best during the warmer months when the lighter evenings encourage outdoor aquatic activity; a Native Coldwater night might be followed up with a Pond Hunt/Barbecue. Similarly, if you include a Native Marine topic, try to co-ordinate this with a forthcoming trip to the coast for a beachcombing day.

There are many sources of entertainment for meetings, the proof of a really successful Secretary is how these are arranged. One constant problem is that the Society's members' levels of fishkeeping expertise is never equal, nor have members the same aquatic interests; newcomers must be catered for as well as the 'experts.' All these things must be considered.

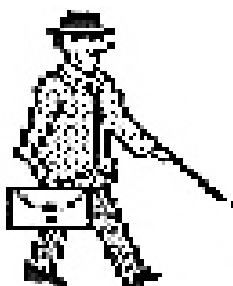
Where to look for programme ideas? One of the best publications for Society Secretaries is the **YEARBOOK** published by the Federation of British Aquatic Societies; in addition to featuring a comprehensive Judges and Speakers List (including non-FBAS sources), Societies' meeting places and times, lists of Publications, Show Dates etc., it is particularly valuable as a programme aid. Details of audio-visual programmes from all manner of sources (Including Specialist Societies) will all help to make the Secretary's job easier. Contact with other Societies can be invaluable too in creating programme ideas.

What to do if a Speaker cancels at the last minute? Well, here you will have to fall back on contingency plans (see **MEMBERS' NIGHTS**, page 15). Fortunately there are some Speakers who prefer 'last-minute' bookings (especially those whose daytime jobs do not run to regular patterns) and don't overlook the possibility of a Judge being willing to come along and talk either. If a cancellation occurs within, say, a month of the meeting, there may be time to arrange an audio-visual programme. Mention has already been made of the FBAS YEARBOOK as a source of programme ideas: **FBAS QUIZBOOKS** also provide an excellent emergency standby for those 'situations beyond your control.'

Keeping an ear close to the aquatic ground, is another Secretarial gift worth developing; it is quite probable that, between meetings, some events will occur which will need to be brought to the notice of members. A quiet word to the Chairman will allow him to allocate time for this 'extra' at the next meeting.

One of the most important duties the Secretary must do, **without fail**, is to notify all those likely to be concerned, of his (or her) address, especially if this is changed at anytime (see **SOCIETY PUBLICITY** page 11-13). The Secretary might well require many addresses, but it is vitally important that others know his! These days, email and the Internet save a lot of paperwork and postage.

Finally, the work of a conscientious Secretary can take up a tremendous amount of time, patience and effort in what is, after all, spare time; so next time you hear a Secretary being elected with the encouraging words, "There's nothing to it," may this nothing-could-be-farther -from-the-truth statement be forgiven.



Treasurer

Of all the Society's Committee positions, the Treasurer's requires more exact, or pertinent, skills than the others. Ideally, there should be a report of the Society's current financial position made at every Committee, or Society meeting. This enables error detection and avoids auditing problems later; also any query about Society finances can be instantly answered.

A very important feature is the Treasurer's method to keep track of the accounts. Slap-happy ways lead to problems – it's no harder to use a well-tried method.

Opening a suitable Bank Account can be tricky -some Banks regard Societies as businesses and require last year's accounts - a problem for any new venture. Try **Building Societies**, **Girobank** and don't forget smaller **Independent Banks**. The eventual account should have a chequebook with two or three authorised signatories, usually **Chairman** or **Secretary**, countersigned by the Treasurer. Set a limit over which all bills are paid by cheque, smaller amounts being covered by signed receipt at time of payment. This can save the Treasurer a lot of work: cheque- or receipt-book stubs then account for all transactions.

The simplest method of keeping the books could be set out as follows.

CREDIT			DEBIT		
Date	Item	£	Date	Item	£
9/1/05	Subscriptions	25.00	9/1/05	Rent	10.00
	Raffle	25.00		Raffle prizes	5.00
	Auction %	2.15		Speaker	15.00
	Donations	5.00			
	Totals	57.15			25.00

Income over Expenditure £ 32.15

This layout shows profit or loss incurred at a single meeting. At the end of the year similar totals are gathered together to give the final annual figure.

Extending this system to include all meetings is easy, however a periodic totalling (say, every six months) is advisable. An extended form might look like this:

CREDIT			DEBIT		
Date	Item	£	Date	Item	£
4/1/05	Subscriptions	25.00	9/1/05	Rent	10.00
	Raffle	25.00		Raffle prizes	5.00
	Auction %	2.15		Speaker	15.00
	Donations	5.00			
18/1/05	Table Show Entries	2.00	18/1/05	Rent	10.00
	Raffle	20.00		Raffle prizes	5.00
	Sundries	2.50		Judge's Fee	5.00
23/1/05	Coach trip	350.00	23/1/05	Coach Hire	300.00
	Raffle	50.00		Raffle prizes	15.00
	Sundries	5.00			

Set out **CREDIT** and **DEBIT** columns on facing pages to make error detection easy. The next method makes accounting easier still.

CREDIT								(A)
Date	Event	Cheque No	Subs	Raffle	Auction	Table Shows	Coach Trips	Sundries/Donations
9/1/05	1 st meeting		25.00	25.00	2.15			5.00
18/1/05	Table Show			20.00		2.00		2.50
23/1/05	Coach trip			50.00			350.00	5.00
Totals (C)			25.00	95.00	2.15	2.00	350.00	12.50
								486.65 (B)

Itemise income at each meeting and total **horizontally** at (A)

The amounts shown at (A) are then added **vertically** to show total (B)

Enter each column's **vertical** total at (C) then add these **horizontally**, which should then agree with previous total figure at (B)

This Table is for **INCOME** (Credit). Set up another for **OUTGOINGS** (Debit)

At each meeting the Treasurer should note every transaction (however small). At the end of the financial year, accounts should be audited by two independent people, not qualified accountants necessarily, but with sufficient ability to produce clear, and comprehensible balance sheets.

One other area which might be seen to involve the Treasurer is insurance. The Society's own perpetual Trophies should be insured against loss (be sure to specify where they are stored and whether losses during transit is included). During the Society's own Open Show, make sure the Society (and/or the premises where the Show is held) has cover against Public Liability claims.

TREASURERS

Save your Society money!

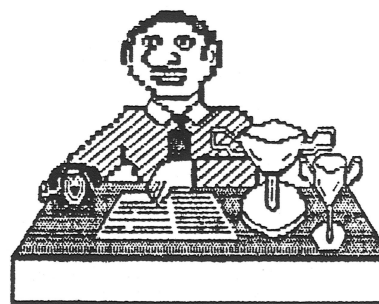
Affiliate to the FBAS!

This will entitle you to:

FREE AUDIO-VISUAL PROGRAMMES
FREE FBAS YEARBOOK
FREE FISH SIZE BOOK
FREE SHOW PACK
FREE SOCIETY PACK
FREE QUARTERLY MAGAZINE
FREE UPDATED SHOW
INFORMATION

Plus

Discounts on DVD programmes
Financial Assistance with Conventions



Show Secretary

Until the Society gets into its stride, the new Show Secretary may not be too over-worked but still choose the right person for the job. Ideally, they should be interested in competitive showing and be fairly up to date with the Show Standards required for each type of fish.

The Society should move into Show activities with caution. There is no other area of fishkeeping where it is so easy to cause aggravation and recrimination - people's reputations as fishkeepers are easily dented. Have independent, impartial Judges, trained by the national body using approved Standards, Judging Sheets, measuring and calculating instruments.

When arranging **Table Shows**, allow for seasonal species –Goldfish in Summer, and don't leave shorter-lived fishes such as Killifish until late in the year. Tie in Speakers subjects with table Show Classes (See **SECRETARY'S DUTIES**, pages 22-23). With Inter-Society matches, the Show Secretary selects the 'home team' fishes.

Use the correct grade of Judge at Table Shows. Judges are graded according to the needs of the job – C, B and A Class – the top grade being needed at Open or national Shows. Booking 'top-flight' Judges for a Table Show denies valuable (and very necessary) judging experience to lower grade Judges who are in training, thus ensuring a continuous supply of quality Judges for the future. 'Brief' members in advance of any Show how their entries will be judged and how species are divided into relevant Classes.

Three FBAS Publications – **Show Rules (Booklet No 5)**, **The Yearbook (Booklet No 7)** and **The Organization of the Open Show (Booklet No 14)** – give information on **Pointing** (what the Judges are looking for), what **Show Classes** different species belong to; **lists of Judges** (non FBAS ones too) and how to book them; what **Trophies** are available, what **The Brooch Scheme** is and how to apply for both of them; how to prepare a **Show Schedule** and get them top all known exhibitors in your area; picking a suitable **Show Hall**; how to obtain **Tank/Exhibit Labels**, **Judging Sheets** and **Award Cards**.

The inexperienced Show Secretary will not know to which Class fishes belong: **National Show Fish Sizes (Booklet No 6)** and **Dictionary of Common/Scientific Names (Booklet No.9)** will put him/her right should exhibitors insist on entering fish under common names only!

Although you can begin to see why some experience is needed in order to get a Show under way there is no lack of back-up information as long as you know where to find it. (See addresses of FBAS services at end of this Booklet or check out the FBAS website – <http://www.fbas.co.uk>).

At **Table Shows**, enter the fish names on the Judging Sheet for the Judge, moving incorrectly placed fishes into their right Classes where necessary; prepare the Award Cards for signing by the Judges not forgetting to countersign them yourself or to check they have been 'starred' and signed by the Judge. Ask the Judge for his expenses and get the Treasurer to pay up!

At **Open Shows** there is much more advance work to do: Show Schedules have to be prepared, printed and sent out to other Societies; Judges must be booked; Trophies, Show Packs and other Awards have to be applied for from aquatic organisations and magazines and the Society's own Trophies must be bought and engraved. Incidentally, if this is not a first Open Show, previously-awarded Club Trophies must also be gathered in. The Hall must be prepared, benching erected and marked out (by the way the Show Secretary shouldn't venture too far from the phone at this time either!)

On Show day, book in entries and locate in their correct Classes. Judges must be welcomed and meals arranged. Result Sheets must be checked for errors and displayed in a prominent place for exhibitors to see; Award Labels must be fixed to the winning tanks; deal with Award Cards as for Table Shows.

Once the Show is over (don't forget to debench any of your own fish you put in the Show!) fill in any necessary Show and Trophy Report Forms and return them to the appropriate Trophy Officer so that your Show qualifies its exhibitors for any Brooch Scheme and their fish for any further 'Supreme Championship' or 'Champion of Champions' competitions later in the year. 'Thank You' letters to sponsors or prize-presenters can be done by the Secretary or PRO.

There are, too, all the internal competitions that your Society organises throughout the year and the paperwork for these must also be kept up to date - and you thought the Secretary's job was the one to avoid!

PRO

The PRO presents the Society's image to the public. In essence it is an advertising job and so a more than just a slightly extrovert person, with the ability not only to sniff out news stories (or invent them if necessary) and also not to take 'no' for an answer, would fit the bill nicely.



Make note of anything newsworthy that happens in meetings 'Catfish Escapes.' 'Can anyone stop Fred winning the Raffle?' etc are all perhaps trivial headlines in themselves, but they just might catch the local newspaper Editor's eye and so give your Society some welcome publicity. Similarly, should you see a fish-orientated story in the press that is worthy of expanding (or even correcting) get in touch with the Editor and offer to supply extra information. Reporting every meeting can seem a chore and material might be hard to find, but eventually mountains can be made out of modest molehills. Take photographs of winners at your Shows and send to the aquatic periodicals and food manufacturers.

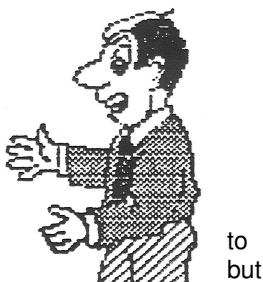
Developing a relationship with the local aquatic store not only helps to bring custom to them but also might attract the occasional Raffle prize in return: ask if Society meeting times could be displayed (**IT PAYS TO ADVERTISE**, see page 11). When a new aquatic business opens make a point of making yourself known to the owner; he will be glad that there's a potential ready market for his wares.

Keep a constant look-out for opportunities to publicise the Society's work and to encourage new members. Contact neighbouring Societies, with the intent of forming regular, and mutually benefiting, interchanges of activities (**BRING & BUY EVENINGS** etc) Relay relevant information, such as Show dates to the Show Secretary for any necessary action.

Whatever contacts you make, **ALWAYS QUOTE THE SOCIETY'S NAME, MEETING PLACE, NEXT MEETING DATE and CONTACT ADDRESS.** Following any coverage in the Press, or after a Celebrity has officiated at an event, always make sure you write or telephone your thanks

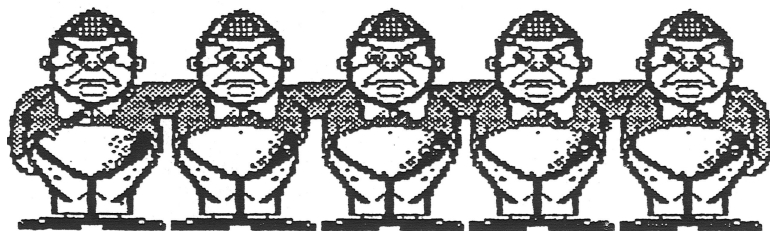
Membership Secretary

This position could be likened to a Welfare Officer, except that the welfare in question is twofold - that of the Society and that of its members. Keep members' addresses and telephone numbers up date, and any sustained absenteeisms checked upon, discreetly!



to
but

It is surprising how important a Society member suddenly feels when someone takes the trouble to keep in touch. The Membership Secretary can greet new faces at the meetings: in his own way, he's a proper little PRO too



Committee Membership

A large Committee may look imposing sitting on the Top Table at the Society's Annual Dinner, but if the Society is relatively small, a Committee of three or four (Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer and perhaps Show Secretary) will be quite adequate: extra members can be co-opted on for any special duties as required.

'Who becomes a Committee member? Work on electing capable people for definite jobs; avoid having 'self-important' passengers on the Committee solely for their own vanity. A Committee member may be delegated to represent the floor members' interests: often regarded by other Society members as being more 'approachable' than other Committee members any feedback through this member helps the Committee to arrive at Society policy and plan the most popular events.

Committee Work

Committee meetings seem to produce much better results when decisions are arrived at in the relaxed and comfortable atmosphere of a member's home – and it's cheaper than hiring a room especially for the purpose too!

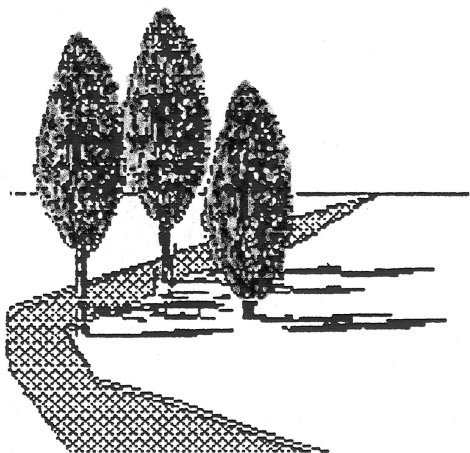
One of the first jobs the Committee should do is compose a written set of Rules (or Constitution) for the Society. Set out, in plain language, the aims of the Society Conditions of Membership (including Terms of Office for Committees etc) and maybe the Membership Fees It is usual practice to only alter these Rules at the Society's Annual General Meeting

How the Committee regulates the policy of the Society depends very much upon the size of the Society. Usually if the membership is very large Committee decisions are accepted with complete trust. With new or smaller Societies Committee recommendations should be taken to Club meetings for full discussion; this gives members a sense of joint responsibility for early Society policy making. Where the Society appears to be in the hands of a select few it is often hard to get support from members.

The sheer amount of Committee Work often goes unappreciated. It is very time - consuming (it's in addition to the Society's regular meetings) and very often discussions can be quite acrimonious; do leave these differences in the Committee meeting-room and always present a united face to the members, no matter what individual feelings might be.

Other Posts

Large Societies often split up the duties to lighten the workload: a typical example of this is to have a **Programme Secretary** who deals exclusively with booking the Society's entertainments. A **Social Secretary** would be an asset if regular dances, outings or other social activities are to be undertaken. Many Societies produce Newsletters and/or websites; the **Editor/Webmaster** may be elected on to the Committee: this post could be coupled with that of the **PRO**. When an Inter-Society or an Open Show, is planned the Show Secretary's duties may be so great that a **Show Manager** is needed to co-ordinate stalls, exhibits by specialist Societies, Club Shop and so on. Similarly, a separate **Trophy Secretary** could also be useful on such busy occasions.



WHERE TO NEXT?

There comes a time in the life of most new Societies, when the feeling gets about that everything has been done that can be reasonably expected. All the faces are too well-known and the shape of the meetings are too predictable. At this stage, more often than not the question arises "Where do we go from here?"

Most people's thoughts eventually turn to expansion. A number of Societies in the same area may have formed a 'League' say for Inter-Club Shows or Quiz matches. Further up the scale, these Societies may become an Area Group within a larger National organisation. Becoming involved with any of these groups benefits the lone Society on many levels.

Judges and Speakers visiting the Society often mention the National body, so do get more information. This may be in the form of a brochure, a short audio-visual presentation (usually available free); better still, get an Official to come along and present the information on a more personal level - it's easier to get answers from a live person than a Tape!

The main question everyone wants answering (apart from "How much is it going to cost us?") is "What do we get out of it?"

Take, for example, the FBAS (readers in other areas please be tolerant, there are many parallels to be found in other worthy organisations.) It provides qualified Judges for Societies' Shows, Speakers and Audio-visual materials for Society meetings. It arranges an annual **Festival of Fishkeeping Weekend** event. Publications produced at very reasonable costs, provide material (aimed at the exhibiting hobbyist) over and above that found in more colourful, commercially-available works.

Membership can be tailored to suit your Society's needs if you are beyond the physical reach of Judges and Speakers. Associate Membership brings you all other services (Programme Hire, Publications etc) at advantageous rates.

Some Societies are all too content to be 'spoon-fed' by the parent body but, at the same time, constantly gripe about one thing or another. It is often forgotten that the parent body relies on its members to provide the market for its services. Sending a Delegate to its quarterly meetings gives your Society a constructive voice in its affairs, helping to right wrongs or improve the system if necessary.

So far so good, but if the member Society doesn't bother to participate nor to read reports of these meetings circulated to them, then they are not giving the support they should, nor are they are getting the full benefit of membership - in either instance, they have only themselves to blame.

Affiliation must be a two-way, co-operative action to be worthwhile and practical.

Conclusion

Some attempt has been made in these pages to show that every Officer in the Society has an important part to play. All positions (together with their respective duties) are closely interwoven and must be seen working together for the good of the Society. To take a mechanical analogy, each post can be seen as part of a complicated machine which, whilst all the cogs intermesh smoothly, carries the load easily; it only takes a little misalignment (people getting fed up, or overworked at the expense of others) for the machine to break down.

We hope the foregoing will enable you to get your Society off the starting blocks and also help to avoid many of the teething troubles along the way.

A frequent cry heard in moments of stress is "It's only a hobby!" so, despite all the warnings, never forget:

ENJOY YOUR FISHKEEPING

FURTHER INFORMATION

Five hobby magazines, 'Today's Fishkeeper,' 'Practical Fishkeeping,' 'Tropical Fish,' 'Tropical World' and 'Marine World' are published in the U.K., with T.F.H and F.A.M.A. being regularly imported from the U.S.A.

In addition to individual Aquatic Societies, there are a number of Specialist Societies (often corresponding, rather than holding regular meetings) devoted to specific groups of fishes, ie, Anabantids, Catfish, Characins, Cichlids, Discus, Gobies, Killifish, Koi, Marines, Rainbowfish etc.

The Federation of British Aquatic Societies is fishkeeping's largest governing body in the U.K. Full information on its services can be found on the FBAS website at:

<http://www.fbas.co.uk>

Aquarium accessory/food manufacturers offer advisory services and many, exclusively through the FBAS, provide gifts for use at Societies' Shows.

FBAS MEMBERSHIP DETAILS from: GENERAL SECRETARY,
44 Weeks Road, Ryde,
Isle of Wight PO33 2TL

FBAS MERCHANDISING from: FBAS MERCHANDISING,
31 Pondwicks, Amersham,
Bucks HP7 0ER

FBAS AQUA TALKS & VIDEOS from: AQUATALKS OFFICER,
4 Copthall Close, Chalfont St Peter,
Buckinghamshire SL9 0DH

SOCIETY LOCATION DETAILS from: SOCIETY LOCATOR,
22 Flamsted Avenue, Wembley,
Middlesex HA9 6DL

Other Federations and Associations include:

The Federation of Northern Aquarium Societies, Union of Scottish Aquarists,
The Federation of Scottish Aquarist Societies, Association of Aquarists,
The Yorkshire Association of Aquarist Societies,

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