

# Loaches

## Care Guide

### Personality

Loaches make up a group of largely bottom-dwelling fish from the families Balitoridae, Botiidae, Cobitidae, Gastromyzontidae, Nemacheilidae, Serpenticobitidae and Vaillantellidae. Few aquarium fish exhibit the level of personality that many loach species are known for, and many aquarists frequently interact with their loach pets. Loaches are found throughout most of Asia, from tropical to temperate zones and range in size from under 2" to nearly a foot long.

### Natural Habitat

Loaches occur in rivers, as well as a variety of slow and swift moving streams, depending on species. The bottom is frequently strewn with gravel, pebbles and smooth boulders, but sandy areas are also present. In most habitats, plants are scarce to non-existent.

### Water Requirements

Loaches come from a variety of water conditions, but most will thrive in the average aquarium. pH should be maintained between 6.0 and 8.0, with alkalinity between 3° and 10° dKH (50 to 175 ppm). All loaches require clean, well oxygenated water with moderate to strong flow. Temperature requirements vary depending on species. If the aquarium is kept in a room below the minimum temperature, use an Aqueon<sup>®</sup> Aquarium Heater to maintain proper water temperature. Maintain good filtration and do a 10% water exchange every week or 25% every 2 weeks using an Aqueon<sup>®</sup> Aquarium Water Changer or Siphon Vacuum Gravel Cleaner. Do not forget to treat tap water with Aqueon<sup>®</sup> Water Conditioner before refilling your aquarium!



### Housing Requirements

Aquarium size will depend on the species of loach you want to keep. Sand or fine gravel is the best substrate for most loaches. When keeping species that live in fast-moving streams, add smooth pebbles and rocks, and provide moderate to strong flow to simulate their natural habitat. Many loaches are secretive, so caves, hollow logs and other size-appropriate hiding places should be available in the aquarium.

### Behavior/Compatibility

Loaches are gregarious, and if possible, should be purchased in groups of 6 or more. With so many species to choose from, no matter what size aquarium or type of fish you own, there is one just right for you. Most loaches are quite peaceful and do well in community tanks. However, some members of the family Botiidae can become boisterous and may go after smaller or slower moving fish. These species are best kept with larger, more active fish. Always research fish or ask an aquarium expert before purchasing.

### Feeding

While most loaches will accept a wide variety of foods, special consideration should be given to those species that come from fast moving water, such as the Hill Stream loaches. Many of these fish feed on algae, cyanobacteria and other microorganisms that colonize rocks on the bottom. These fish should only be placed in mature aquariums with plenty of appropriate rockwork. For best results, rotate their diet daily and feed only what they can consume in under 2 minutes, once or twice a day.

### Breeding Level – Difficult

Very few loaches have been bred in home aquariums, and most accounts are incidental. Some commercial breeders in Southeast Asia have had success inducing loaches to spawn with the use of hormones.