

August 2011 Quietelk

Congratulations Anthony on winning TOTM for August 2011 with your beautiful, flourishing reef tank. Read more here: <http://www.masa.asn.au/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=51&t=233060>

Anthony is known as Quietelk on the RTAW forums and you can find out more about his tank in his tank journal.

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INTRODUCTION

My first system was a 4' x 18" x 18" tank designed by Jem Aquatics in Canberra. Daggy fluoro tubes, Queen skimmer, trickle filter onto bioballs... but it worked really well and after a couple of upgrades (T5 lights, AquaC skimmer) it turned into a really great, if rather flubbery, mixed reef. Then the power blew .

Now I'm in the Blue Mountains just five minutes' drive from Salt Aquariums, so it seemed almost like fate that I should get back into the hobby. I grabbed a little nano cube to see how I could manage system care with two small kids, but pretty soon the bug had re-bitten hard, I was running at 150W MH over this 120L tank and trying to do impossible stuff with SPS... so an upgrade was necessary!

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CURRENT SETUP

Enter

this Dalbarb 3 x 2 x 2 system, on 22 December 2010. The idea here was to keep things as simple as possible and make this a "one plug in the wall" tank - no plumbing into the house, no drilling into the wall. The only changes to the house are two tiny holes in the ceiling for the Vertex Illumina's suspension kit.

I went for the three-footer as it precisely fits a space in the family room between two doors. It does mean I can't bolt on a refugium or anything as there's no space for a cabinet next to the tank.

If I'd had a bit more cash, I would have gone 3 x 3 x 2, as the space would fit that too. An upgrade one day maybe?

Since

I got pretty good results without a sump on the nano, the sump on this system is pretty minimal - just a 500mm cube that exists as somewhere to stash the skimmer and heater, really. There's a bit of Matrix in there, sort of as insurance against a dead fish or other nutrient spike. And with 125L of volume, it's a good, well, sump for any overflow should I lose power.

The system has a traditional, old-school weir and return pipe on the opposite side of the tank. I know fancy boxes and coast-to-coast weirs are all the rage now, but I still think there's some value in having the return as far from the overflow as possible.

The

tank is euro-braced as there's no hood or collar - that's because the Vertex is a slab of minimalist black awesome that doesn't need to be hidden away. The solid wooden stand is 1000mm high for maximum presence!

EQUIPMENT LIST

Aquabee return pump

Vortech MP40W main circulation

2x Tunze 6025 (probably redundant)

Deltac MC500 skimmer

300W heater

Vertex Illumina SR900 LED pendant

Tunze Osmolator top-up

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FILTRATION

I'm pretty sure there's less than 100kg of live rock in the tank. I wasn't really keeping track of how much I put in there. Could even be as low as 40kg I guess.

I also have some matrix in the sump, though any benefit it gives is probably in my mind!

I run a filter sock on the end of the return pipe to pick up a bit of gunk.

MAINTENANCE

Clean the glass constantly. Probably four or five times a week. There's not much growth of algae that needs a scraper, but the glass dusts up really quickly - sometimes within hours of a clean!

I change out 60L of NSW every week.

The filter sock needs cleaning every week until it gets to a point where it clogs up again within 24 hours, then I buy a new one.

I empty and clean the skimmer max twice a week, often only once.

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FEEDING

I feed a slurry of Reef Roids, frozen brine (the one with spirulina), a

cap of amino acid / vitamin mix, and daphnia every other day.

ADDITIVES

I add 20g of Red Sea Reef Foundation B to the top-up water every time I refill the bucket to maintain KH - carbonate gets depleted VERY quickly in this tank. I add 10g of Red Sea Reef Foundation ABC+ to the sump every day. This seems to keep colours up and growth strong, though I am worried about a few colonies and may invest in a set of dosing pumps soon.

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LIGHTING

The glamour component of this setup - and the big equipment investment - is the Vertex Illumina SR900 LED pendant. It's awesome. I actually just run it using the default setting. That's a yellow dawn at 0800h ramping up to 100% white, 100% blue and 100% royal blue by 1000h. In the evening, white drops away by about 1900h and then it's an hour of deepening dusk until the royal blues go off at 2000h.

I know I can program all kinds of funky settings into this thing, but given the health of the stock at the moment I figure don't mess around with what seems to be working!

FISH

Siganus vulpinus (foxface)

Centropyge flavicauda (white tail pygmy angel)

Assessor flavissimus (yellow assessor)

Salarias fasciatus (jewelled blenny - calling him lawnmower is mean!)

2x *Amphiprion ocellaris* (one B&W, one natural)

5x *Apogon cyanosoma* (orange striped cardinals)

2x *Anthias* sp. (actual species unknown)

Gobidon citrinus (citron goby - a hitchhiker in a millipora colony!)

Paragobius lacunicolus (panda goby - another hitchhiker, haven't seen him for a while though)

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SESSILE INVERTEBRATES

Acropora sp.

Millipora sp.

Montipora sp.

Duncanopsammia axifuga

Porites sp.

Blastomussa sp.

Xenia sp.

Corallimorphs

Clavularia

Pocillipora

Acanthastrea

Lobophyton

Sarcophyton

A green brain I can't remember the scientific name of.

Lots of other bits and pieces.

Surprisingly resilient barnacles on rock and in several acro colonies.

I
subscribe to the theory that having a bit of flubber - especially xenia
- controls DOCs. I have a few acro colonies that came with softies
attached. I figure this is the natural way and should be promoted. Xenia
is easy to cut out - though it feels funny hacking away at coral that
sometimes retails for \$120! However, softies do eventually ruin the
aesthetics of the aquascape as they grow so large so quickly. Frag and
frag often!

MOTILE INVERTEBRATES

4x Trochus sp. (snails!)

4x Strombus sp. (snails!)

Pair Stenopus hispidus (coral banded shrimp) - they spawn constantly

Quite a large mantis shrimp (10cm)

Many, many acro crabs of wildly different shapes, colours, sizes

Several small shrimp in acro colonies including a really cool red one

Many small burrowing shrimp

At least one very large pistol shrimp (10cm+)

I think there's one hermit crab left in there, I keep adding them but the mantis eats them all.

Scary black spikey-looking brittle stars

Enormous bristle worm or two.

Hundreds if not thousands of isopods, seriously they are out of control!

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CONCERNS

This little piece of paradise is not without its trouble. I'm currently concerned about a few coral colonies that have exhibited basal recession - none of the SPS in the top half of the tank has any problems, but some of the stuff at the bottom has struggled a little.

I had a nice goniopora that suddenly packed it in, but that's par for the course I guess. A big pink pocillipora I had to bust up and scatter around the top of the tank. The green montipora also lost most of its colour - though not on the rim where it's growing interestingly enough.

It's hard to decide on a course of action since overall the tank is really healthy and shows good colour and strong growth!

I also have trouble with the clavularia - which I like - far from being weeds as most people find, the two colonies I have go through phases of looking really great and then looking sort of withered. I pulled off a lot of nudibranchs over a period of several months so maybe there's one or two left... vigilance!

I am also undecided about the big mantis in the tank. He hasn't taken any fish or damaged corals, but he slaughters hermits and grabs other crabs when he can. I really like him, but I think he'll be on permanent probation, really.

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SHOUTS

All the stock in this tank comes from Salt Aquariums which quite frankly I wish all LFSs were like - clean, cool equipment, great stock. The tank is Dalbarb and beautifully made. Really though full credit has to go to Vertex - you totally get what you pay for with this pendant. For the price of a good computerised MH pendant but without the globe replacement costs, you get a very blue light that corals seem to love. And the simplicity of operation, low heat, and compact design is just fantastic.

So far so good - this tank has been easy to set up and cycle and has given me great results really fast. I can't believe it's only nine months old! I can't wait to see what it's like once it's three or four years! In fact I put most of the tiny problems with odd colonies down to the fact that this tank is still cycling, really.

One benefit of feeding Reef Roids is that I have really rampant sponge growth. Lots of species, including a yellow one that's grown so fast it's actually engulfed bubble algae! And the sump is filling up with feather-duster worms and colourless sponges really fast.

So all that remains is to thank the MASA gang for the honour of being Tank of the Month for August! And at the end of the day I hope my tank shows that you can get great results with only a couple of pieces of quality equipment, and a bit of old-fashioned diligence. Computers? Who needs 'em!

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