

WARENDORF (MÜNSTERLAND REGION, GERMANY)

Visiting Europe's largest discus hatchery



The building's pale grey exterior is decorated with a magnificent Red Turquoise discus fish, the company logo of the Stendker Discus Fish Hatchery.

| BY RAINER STAWIKOWSKI

For 47 years, the Stendker Discus Fish Hatchery has been breeding its popular Cichlids. In the summer of 1998, the brothers Jörg (46) and Volker (42) took over the company from their father Heinz Stendker, who had laid the foundation for today's professional hatchery in 1965, with just four discus fish. They decided to set up the "Diskuszucht Stendker GmbH

& Co. KG" enterprise. The company currently employs around 40 staff members. Approximately 200,000 discus fish come to life every year in the hatchery in Warendorf, Germany. Around 1,500 specialist petshops in Germany stock Stendker discus fish and the majority of Symphysodon sold on the German market comes from the hatchery based in the Münsterland

A pair of Stendker discus fish, caring for its brood, on display at the "Zierfische & Aquarium" 2011 Exhibition in Duisburg, Germany

Photo: Rainer Stawikowski

Region. In addition, the company also ships its fish to over 30 countries, including destinations as far afield as Australia. Whether in Dubai, Russia or China – Stendker discus fish are becoming ever more popular because these captive bred fish are accustomed to German tap water and are very straightforward to keep.

Naturally, the German specialist pet shop sector has changed significantly since the 1960s, when Heinz Stendker first began breeding discuses. Back then, the industry was dominated by many small retailers, some of which even specialised in specific sorts of fish. Today, the sector is dominated by a small number of ever larger chains, with their often numerous branches. This change in the industry also made its effects felt in the Stendker hatchery. Today, even hardware stores, XXL pet shops or garden centres with aquarium departments are among the company's customers. The "Stendker Discus" brand enjoys an excellent reputation with its customers for high-quality and robust fish, which – if given appropriate care – have a long lifespan. In fact, these fish can live for as long as 15 years.

This gives rise to the question of how the quality of discus fish from other sources, like hatcheries in the Erzgebirge Region (Ore Mountains) in Central Europe, which have also been breeding aquarium fish for several decades, measures up. These hatcheries are no doubt run professionally, Jörg and Volker Stendker state. However, it is vital to not mix discus fish from different sources, like Asian captive breeds or fish caught in the wild with Stendker discus fish, as fish from different sources may be carriers of different bacterial strains.

The company philosophy of the Warendorf-based hatchery is: "Keeping discus fish – made easy!" The hatchery provides a free "instruction manual" for keeping discus fish on its website, for everyone

interested in discuses. All core issues are addressed – from water changes right through to feeding. "This makes it possible, even for first-time aquarium owners, to enjoy the experience of keeping discuses. We want to help our fish thrive in the aquariums of our customers all over the world", says Jörg Stendker.

discus fish are "real" Cichlids! That means it is best to keep them in a group of at least ten fish. In a 300 litre aquarium, ten to twelve discus fish can easily be kept – provided that the aquarium is fitted with a powerful and reliable filter and a high-quality aeration stone, and if weekly water changes are not neglected.



Two brilliantly coloured Stendker Téfé discus fish Photos: Volker Stendker



Two fully-coloured Pigeon Blood Snake discus fish

It's necessary to keep in mind that discus fish are "real" Cichlids

The Stendker company is convinced that its discus fish are among "the most robust ornamental fish available on the market", as these captive bred fish no longer have much in common with the discus fish caught in the wild.

Some aquarium owners may criticise this. But, as long as certain requirements are met, the statement itself is difficult to refute. The first important requirement is quite simple: : It's necessary to keep in mind that

Speaking of water: in the Warendorf-based hatchery, the discus fish are kept in normal tap water, which in this region comes straight from the tap with a general hardness value of approx. 15 °dGH, a carbonate hardness value of 8 °KH, a conductivity value of 800 µs/cm and a pH value of > 7. Appropriately high water temperatures are also vital (28 to 30 °C, which corresponds to the conditions in the discus fish's natural habitat). The equally important water quality is ensured by using charcoal and mat filters ("nothing beats the famous blue foam mats").

And for information regarding feeding, see the info box about “Beef Heart” overleaf.

By adhering to these principles, his son, who is now 15 years old, began keeping an aquarium 3 years ago, Jörg Stendker says. Sebastian Stendker

based hatchery are certainly not the “fragile, sensitive creatures” that discus fish are often claimed to be. This is proven by the exquisite discus pairs, which the Stendker hatchery regularly displays at larger aquarium trade fairs,

a brood of swimming juvenile fish, are always an eye-catcher for the exhibition visitors.

I ask Jörg and Volker Stenker whether it is a challenge to transport the discus pairs and their offspring from the Münsterland Region to far-off Lake Constance, where they are expected to simply continue their brood care. They answer that it is not difficult, but that the offspring need to be at least twelve days of age. Ideal are juvenile fish between two and three weeks old, as at this age the juvenile fish derive their feed from the epidermis of their parents.

I’m interested in finding out which discus colour variations the Stendker hatchery currently has on its agenda. Jörg Stendker explains that his father had been breeding a Red Turquoise discus for more than ten years, when a particularly attractive offspring caught his attention. This fish had lovely red spots, just as fish from the Téfé Region typically do. This fish was of course selected for further breeding, but it ended up taking many more years of work, before such stunningly patterned offspring started appearing in larger numbers. Subsequently, a discus fish caught in the wild in Satarém was cross bred into this variety. Incidentally, for the past 19 years, the hatchery has ceased using discus fish caught in the wild for their breeding programme, so as to avoid introducing diseases and so as to not endanger their hardy breeding stock. Today, this popular variety is sold as the “Stendker Téfé”, although this name obviously does not refer to the fishes’ geographical origin.



Stendker discus on display at the “Aqua-Fisch 2008” Exhibition in Friedrichshafen, Germany Photo: Rainer Stawikowski



“Nothing beats mat filters!” Photo: Volker Stendker

successfully reared twelve discus fish, approximately 8 cm in size in a 1 metre aquarium provided by his father. His success contributed to the idea of drawing up the “instruction manual” referred to previously. It shows how easy Stendker discus fish are to keep. The fish from the Warendorf-

where these discus pairs care for their brood in an exemplary fashion. Whether at the “Zierfische & Aquarium” Exhibition in Duisburg, at the “Aqua-Fisch 2008” Exhibition in Friedrichshafen, or at the Interzoo Trade Fair in Nürnberg – aquariums, in which parent fish are caring for



Staff members of the Stendker Discus Fish Hatchery. Front and centre: Volker and Jörg Stendker.

Another variety which has become very popular – and which is Volker Stendker’s current favourite – is the Pigeon Blood Snake, I am told.

How many captive bred varieties actually exist? “In Warendorf we currently have exactly 21 varieties”, Volker Stendker tells me. Are there any varieties which could be described as “favourites among aquarium enthusiasts”, or are any trends apparent? “Well, on the whole”, says Jörg Stendker, “first-time aquarium owners love all fish which are brightly coloured and spotted.

Experienced aquarium keepers seem to prefer “going back to

the roots” and tend to choose wild varieties.”

It is interesting to note, that neither Jörg nor Volker Stendker have ever seen the original natural habitat of their discus fish first-hand. “When you are surrounded by discus fish, day in and day out, you don’t need to travel to the Amazon. Especially as the wide range of colours of the captive bred fish here, would simply not be available there”, the brothers agree.

“However, we do take great pleasure in the 450 litre aquarium in our living room”, says Volker Stendker, “and the discus fish are naturally from our hatchery.”

Beef heart? Beef heart!

There is some controversy regarding beef heart as fish feed, as “cold-blooded animals”, such as fish, sometimes have difficulty digesting the meat of “warm-blooded animals”. Nevertheless, the Stendker company sells a discus feed, which contains vegetable matter, scalded Cyclopes, a multi-vitamin supplement, minerals and trace elements, as well as beef heart. In the hatchery, the discus fish are fed this feed exclusively.

The solution: digestive aids are added to the feed, which assist the fish in utilising the animal protein. As a result, only approximately half of the feed amount of the standard fish feeds that are commercially available is required. The discus feed is highly concentrated feed. “Only the best for our discus fish!” The results speak for themselves.

Many useful tips on how to keep discus fish successfully are available in the pamphlet “Discus breeding made in Germany – Aquarium-keeping made easy”. The Stendker Discus Fish Hatchery provides this pamphlet to its customers and all interested aquarium owners on their website – it is available as a download, free of charge.

More information about the hatchery is available on the website:

www.diskuszucht-stendker.de

Diskuszucht Stendker GmbH & Co. KG

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We offer a wide range of over 20 colour varieties as well as sizes ranging from 5 cm to jumbo-sized – and all fish originate exclusively from our own hatchery!**

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