**Photo Credit: AquaLog.de*

Aquatic Caecilians *(Typhlonectes spp.)*

Real Life Rubber "Eels"!

Aquatic Caecilians (*Typhlonectes natans*) are a lesser known group of amphibians many might not necessarily know about! Native to the dry to somewhat dry, tropical to sub-tropical regions of South America, these very unusual amphibians may be found in Colombia, Venezuela, Trinidad, and Tobago amongst seasonally wet or flooded grassland and riverine habitats.

Often called "Rubber Eels" or "Congo Eels", these unique species are actually neither eels at all, nor are they from the Congo. Instead, they belong to a lesser well-known group of amphibians known as the caecilians, most of which are highly fossorial, burrowing, elongated worm-like or snake-like amphibians found mostly in tropical to sub-tropical areas of the world (although some such as Typhlonectes are more aquatic). Most only have small, vestigial eyes and highly reduced or absent limbs as well.

Aquatic caecilians were formerly fairly regularly seen in the aquaria and herptile pet trade, until more recent decades. Nonetheless, learn more about the care of these unique amphibians in the latest care guide!

Taxonomy

Life: All living, physical, and animate entities
Domain: Eukaryota
Kingdom: Animalia
Phylum/Sub Phylum: Chordata/Vertebrata
Class: Amphibia
Order: Gymnophiona/Apoda
Family: Typhlonectidae
Genus: Typhlonectes
Species: *Typhlonectes spp.**
**Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the proper care, aquatic caecilians have the potential of reaching 4 to 5 years or more in captivity.

Distribution and Habitat
This aquatic genus of caecilians have a wide range over much of the Amazonian basin and northern South America. More specifically, they may occur from Amazonian Brazil, through Peru, Colombia, Guyana, French Guiana, and potentially Trinidad, Tobago, Suriname and Venezuela. Within this broad range, these caecilians may occur in permanent tto sami-permanent, slow moving or stagnant rivers, streams, and their tributaries and basins, as well as sub-tropical to tropical, moist shrublands, seasonally wet or flooded lowlands, ditches, marshes, swamplands, and other wetlands.

Origin/History
Typhlonectes natans (Fischer, 1880).

Typlonectes natans are often exported from Columbia, and have been widely available in the pet and aquarium trade for many decades, although the exact timing of their first keeping or importation into the U.S. is not known. They would often be marketed as “fish” or “rubber eels”, but they are neither eels, nor other fish. They are also commonly bred in captivity by hobbyists.

Experience Level Required
Intermediate/Moderate.

Size
Most aquatic caecilians reach 12.0 to 24.0 inches in length in total snout-to-tail length, although they have the potential to reach slightly larger sizes. Snout-to-vent length varies depending on the individual caecilian.

Housing and Enclosure
Enclosure System: Primarily Aquatic. Aquatic caecilians should be provided a secure, escape proof aquarium or terrarium designed to hold water. A 10 to 20 gallon long aquarium is of sufficient size depending on the number of animals being housed. They can be housed in pairs or multiples provided adequate food and hiding opportunities are provided, and they are monitored. In general, it is also preferable that aquatic caecilians not be housed with fish, since they may compete for food and resources as well as possibly predate upon one another depending on their sizes and circumstances. Provide an appropriate filtration system as well as water heating, which will assist in maintaining water clarity and quality as well as sufficient water temperatures for these caecilians. Although these caecilians respire, or breathe primarily through their skin, they will also breathe air and should be provided with several inches of air space in the enclosure. Other furnishings to increase safety and security in the enclosure can also be provided, including live plants, rocks, slabs, logs, and other suitable hides. Substrates that allow for burrowing should also be included, and can include fine aquarium sand or gravel. Any live plants in the enclosure should be firmly and securely planted to prevent uprooting.

Temperature, Lighting, and Humidity
Aquatic caecilians have simple and undemanding heating and lighting requirements in captivity, and do not require additional UVA/UVB lighting, although providing it in moderated amounts can be greatly beneficial for their health, immune system, and overall wellness. Aquatic caecilians otherwise do not require any other special lighting or heating unless live plants are also maintained, although water temperatures should be maintained at around 77 to 80 degrees F. For any supplemental heating that may be needed, use a low wattage incandescent or UVA/UVB bulb, radiant or ceramic heat emitter, submersible water heater, or UTH (under tank heating element). They are susceptible to health and husbandry related issues if water temperatures are too cold or too warm for these unusual amphibians. More specific lighting, heating, and humidity

product suggestions and recommendations that can best suit one's needs, as well as those of one's animals can be given as well. Humidity is not applicable for species of these aquatic caecilians.

Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition

Primarily Carnivorous; Depending on the species, caecilians in the wild are primarily carnivorous to scavengers, feeding on insects, earthworms, other invertebrates, small fish, other small amphibians, and carrion, or dead and decaying animal matter. In captivity, aquatic caecilians can be fed daily to every other day, and will consume appropriately sized feeder fish, redworms, bloodworms, earthworms, crickets, mealworms, and other feeder insects and larvae, as well as some commercially available pelleted fish foods of appropriate nutritional value. Any uneaten foods should be cleaned or removed regularly to maintain water clarity and quality. Ensure that any live foods given are also supplemented with calcium and vitamin D3 for the caecilian's optimal health and well-being. More specific dietary and supplementary product suggestions and recommendations that can best suit one's needs, as well as those of one's animals can be given as well.

Handling

Aquatic caecilians are delicate and sensitive skinned amphibians that should not really be handled, and are more suitable for viewing. Use a suitable sized aquarium net to move aquatic caecilians when cleaning the enclosure or whenever necessary. All amphibians breathe and respire through their skin, as well as absorb water through this means. It is therefore important to avoid wearing any chemicals or lotions on your hands, which can be potentially harmful or even fatal to amphibians. It is also important to wash or rinse hands thoroughly, and ensure they are adequately moistened before and after handling any amphibians in order to prevent them from drying out.
Also be sure to practice basic cleanliness and hygiene associated with proper husbandry after touching or handling any animals or animal enclosures to prevent the possibility of contracting salmonellosis or any other zoonotic pathogens

Contact

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