

# FISHPONDS FREQUENTLY FOOL A FELLOW

or

## MERE MUSINGS OF A MOSQUITO MAN

By PERRY W. RUTH

.. Bureau of Mosquito Control, Department Public Welfare,  
Norfolk, Virginia

Mrs. America has gone all out for fish pools during the last few years, if our experience in Norfolk is a fair measure of conditions elsewhere. Whether this trend springs from an over-developed "Mother Instinct" which craves some living thing upon which to expend its protective care or whether it is simply due to the blossoming of an aesthetic urge to decorate the landscape, still remains an unrevealed enigma. But whatever underlies the origin of each prepossessing piscatorial paradise, they have become a headache to mosquito control workers here.

There is no denying that a glistening bit of water properly placed in its garden setting of soft colors adds a special ingredient to the loveliness of the surroundings which is most engaging, while the flashing scales of the graceful pets that glide to the pool's edge to accept dainties from the fingers of their mistress create a restful sensibility which is soothing to the mind as well as pleasurable to the eye. Yes, indeed! The amateur landscape gardener is rightfully enthusiastic about his creation.

But, Oh Brother, what a difference a few months can sometimes make! In certain cases this enthusiasm dwindles and a carelessly constructed pool of water becomes no more than a neglected but permanent mud hole which is ideal for infesting an entire neighborhood with a variety of mosquitoes. Or the family moves, in order to be more convenient to a new war job, making way for new tenants or owners who only care for fish on Fridays and have no interest in gardening—landscape or vegetable. So the birth rate in the mosquito population of that block takes a tremendous jump and the complaint clerk at mosquito head-

quarters goes on an overtime payroll—that is, unless our inspectors make use of the sixth sense which they have to develop and give that fish pond an injection of larvacide before its disease becomes infectious.

Again, let us consider the case of the over-enthusiastic nature lover who proceeds on the theory that a successful fish pond must be a cross between an aquatic conservatory and a botanical museum. This misguided agriculturist starts with divers types of lilies, continues with various species of water hyacinths and concludes with the ferns and grasses which reward a complete lack of care with a luxuriant and prolific growth that is almost frightening. In a few months there is hardly room in this pool for the fish which have become too fat and lazy to force their way through the maze of roots and leaves in order to feed on a thriving colony of mosquito larvae. As guardians of the public's health and comfort, we now have to contend with not only a troublesome breeding problem but also with an outraged fish fancier who insists that mosquitoes and fish do not live in the same pond and perhaps winds up her argument with the statement that "the book says so." This situation requires both courage and tact.

Then, finally, there is the properly designed and carefully tended pool, well stocked with fish, clean and tidy, a delight to the eye. A majority of such pools offer no mosquito problem whatever. Yet even they can not be entirely disregarded by a careful inspector for every so often one of these models of perfection will break every rule of biology and disclose the anomaly of gold fish and mosquito larvae living peacefully together in one happy family. Robert Ripley would not be interested because this has happened more than once but why any self respecting gold fish should ever so fail in its lawful duty is no more explainable than the fact that some cats never become mousers. It will always be necessary to train our men to expect the unexpected.

But to put banter aside and get down to cases, the fish pond has become one of our major problems. Our revised files list 744 of them within the city limits as of last summer and undoubtedly that number will be considerably increased by another year. Our records for the season of 1942 tabulate 175 individual breeding samples brought to our field office from fish ponds and of these, 55 or more than 30 per cent were positively identified as *Anopheles Quadrimaculatus*. We also find that a neglected fish pond is a favorite habitat of the *Aedes Aegypti* which is further evidence of its possibilities as a public enemy.

Like other problems, this one must have a solution, but this appears to differ according to the locality. We understand that in certain cities a system of regulation has been put into effect as an ordinance which covers not only the method of original construction but requires proper maintenance by issuing permits which may be revoked. Also, the distribution of certain species of top feeding minnows by a systematic plan seems to have brought very satisfactory results in many cases. Up to the present, however, we have relied principally on education through cooperation with our Garden and Civic Clubs and individual owners. This, of course, in conjunction with constant vigilance on the part of

our entire inspection force. We feel that we are making good progress, but we hope to avoid the fatal mistake of being satisfied with what we are doing. This effusion, if properly intercepted, means that we are open to suggestions.