



FIRST SIGHT

Jeremy Gay welcomes a particular new product on to the fishkeeping scene.

NT Labs champion fishless cycle cause

I'm going to own up to only recently finding details of a product I've had on file for some time — but one I now wish I had sorted sooner! Basically, it's an over-the-counter fishless cycling kit made especially for fishkeepers and available from your aquatic store.

Why am I so excited? Basically, because it is something we at PFK have been crying out for for ages — and I am so glad that NT Labs have seen the need for such a kit and actually made one.

PFK feel strongly about fishless cycling. The way we see it, although fish can and are used to cycle aquarium filters, by polluting the water with their waste and so feeding bacteria, we think it is pretty unfair to make that fish swim around in its own waste while maturation takes place.

To us it is pretty black and white. We don't ever want to expose any fish of any kind to any ammonia and nitrite at any time.

Fishless cycling seemed to have been conceived on the Internet and it is a movement that has grown to find favour with many hundreds of thousands of hobbyists all over the world.

No matter what your background or experience, when you embrace fishless cycling it is a bit of an epiphany — or at least it was for me. After that moment of realisation you can't see why you or anyone else in the hobby would knowingly expose their fish to stress and pollution when clearly there is another way.

Furthermore, when PFK Website Editor Matt Clarke did a bit of citizen journalism with the website users and phoned up Britain's aquatic retailers, only 4% recommended the practice. The response we got from many of them was that we were trying to disrupt a perfectly acceptable practice. Cycling with fish was the only 'proper' way, they said, and if they didn't sell fish for that purpose someone else would.

I am even trying to convince the sceptics at

OATA to promote the practice as they still see it as unproven. "Our number one priority is water quality," said Keith Davenport of OATA at this year's Glee. "Our number one priority is the welfare of the fish!" I replied. Anyway, I digress...

So, just as I felt like it was going to be a them — the sceptics — and us — the converted — scenario, NT Labs have made my day, and I am sure the day of many other fishless cyclers, by introducing this kit.

"The Start-OK kit provides all you need to mature your aquarium's biological filter before you add the fish, so there is no New Tank Syndrome and the fish do not suffer," read the instructions. They add: "When introducing new fish it is important to minimise stressing fish, especially by allowing high levels of ammonia and nitrite to form."

You don't know how good those words make me feel!

The kit itself contains Aquasure, a dechlorinator, Filter Bugs, the bacteria, Nitrocycle, imitation fish waste, and a liquid nitrite test kit including test pial and colour chart. The instructions are clear and helpful and advise to test nitrite levels daily while cycling, and not to add any fish until all the nitrite has been converted to nitrate.

This kit is spot on, fills a much-needed gap in the market and in our opinion this type of product should be mandatory and much more widely available. No more tracking down ammonia sources either — so to NT Labs, a big well done and thanks for listening to the pro-fishless cyclers!

■ **Price:** £7.99, and treats 500 l/110 gal

■ **More info:** Available online at www.ntlabs.co.uk or call 01622 817692 for your local stockist

The principle of Start-OK fills a huge gap in the market!

