Thanuja’s Fishing

Posted on



Large ponds with green tinged water catches your eye, there is work going on as large nets are cast and slowly drawn as little fish known as Fingerlings (Angillan in Sinhala) are transferred into the cement tank. Soon these Fingerlings will be on their way to large reservoirs that make up the landscape of North Central region to grow into the well-known freshwater fish. This project was initiated by Thanuja Thilakaratne, Sales Director at BT Options during the lockdown period, which he is currently continuing to operate while residing in Bubula, Hingurakgoda.

Words Udeshi Amarasinghe. | **Photographs** Menaka Aravinda.

Having returned home to Bubula, Hingurakgoda from Colombo during the lockdown period, Thanuja met up with friends, and a discussion ensued on what could be done while at home. The opportunity of cultivating Fingerlings arose. Since he had an unused land that could be utilized, the decision was made together with his friends to start a project with the technical advice from the National Aqua-culture Development Authority (NAQDA). Furthermore, as his brother had already established a small scale aquarium for ornamental fish, the family too was

interested in the new project. The aim was to pass on to his brother, Sanuja to continue the work of Fingerling breeding once Thanuja returned to Colombo as soon as the lockdown was lifted. Large mud ponds and cement ponds were constructed within a period of one and a half months, and the work commenced, where Frys were introduced into the mud ponds. This project focuses on the cultivation of Fingerlings from Frys (Asiththa in Sinhala). It is a collaborative effort between NAQDA and the Freshwater Fishermen’s Societies of the area, where the intention of the project is to increase the volume of fish in the reservoirs and lakes. NAQDA manages the maintenance of the reservoirs in the Polonnaruwa, Anuradhapura and Ampara districts. As such these projects are prevalent in all these areas. As part of this process fish breeding is done at the Freshwater Aquaculture Development Centers in Sevanapitiya, Dambulla and Kala Wewa. That is at the Centers, one of their tasks is to first nurture the fish eggs to Frys and thereafter to Fingerlings before they are let into the reservoirs.

However, the volume of fish that is bred at these Centers cannot meet the demand and therefore the opportunity is provided to private individuals such as Thanuja to engage in this project to supply the required volume of fingerlings. There are various types of fish that are cultivated and introduced into the reservoirs and lakes such as varieties of Carps and Thilapia.

The type of fish would be determined by NAQDA according to the requirements of the fishing community in the area. At this project, Thanuja was breeding tilapia. The Freshwater Aquaculture Development Centers provides the Frys, which are about two centimeters each, to the project. These little fish are nurtured for 45 days with constant technical assistance from the NAQDA, until they reach a size of 4-5cm, and then the fish are known as Fingerlings. Large nets were cast in and the grown Fingerlings were collected to transfer into the cement ponds. Amidst the balmy weather of Hingurakgoda the work continued. Generally, the fish are transferred into the cement pond about a day before transporting the fish to the designated reservoirs via Freshwater Aquaculture Development Centers. It is more of a transition point. The project task is completed for that particular cycle once the Fingerlings are transported to the reservoirs and in large oxygenated bowsers.



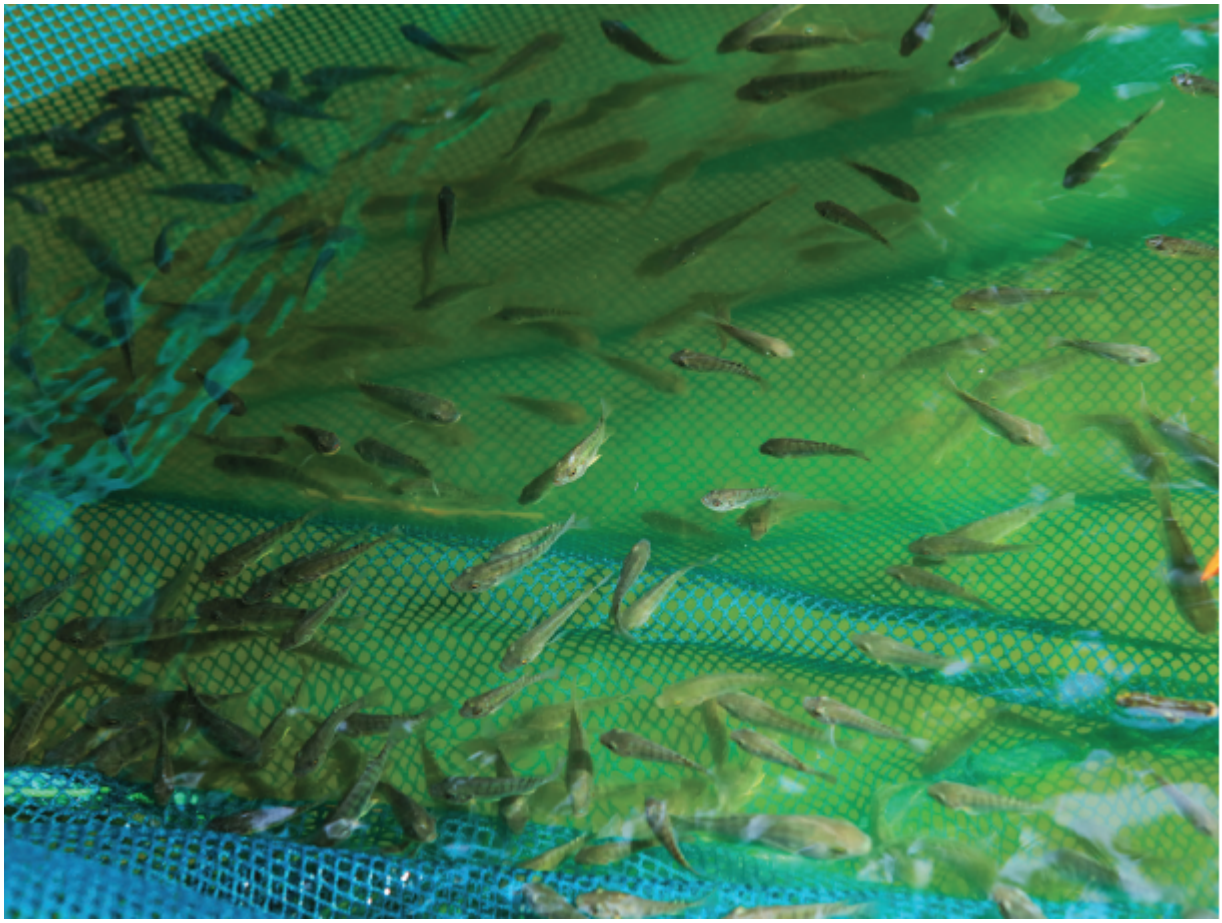
Gathering the harvest of Fingerlings from the mud pond.



Checking the size and quality of the Fingerlings prior to transferring to the cement pond.



Getting ready to count the fingerlings.



Fingerlings need to reach a size of four to five centimeters before transporting to the reservoirs.



J B Indika Udayantha, Aquaculture Extension Officer, Polonnaruwa NAQDA.



Thanuja Thilakaratne, Sales Director, BT Options in Bubula, Hingurakgoda.



A method of checking the Fingerlings to ensure they are of the required size.

Once these Fingerlings grow into large fish in the reservoirs, the fishermen would catch the fish for consumption. Thereafter, according to the continuous requirements of the Fishermen’s Societies, the entire process resumes and the cycle continues again. This project can be done if one has the required area to build the mud and cement ponds according to the requirements of the NAQDA. A A P Athauda, District Aquaculture Extension Officer, Polonnaruwa, NAQDA and J B Indika Udayantha, Aquaculture Extension Officer, Polonnaruwa NAQDA explained that this entire initiative is to support the livelihoods of the freshwater fishermen in the North Central region. Thanuja believes that there is an opportunity in Higurakgoda as he is the first to start the project in the area, because there is a demand for the supply of freshwater fish. Thousands of Fingerlings swam to and fro, little did they know that they would soon be heading far, to various regions of the country, thus continuing to provide a livelihood to the people in those areas.



Thousands of Thilapia Fingerlings are bred in the ponds.



Counting the Fingerlings in the cement pond.



A A P Athauda, District Aquaculture Extension Officer, Polonnaruwa, NAQDA.