

CANADIAN LAWS ON IMPORT AND EXPORT OF ORNAMENTAL FISHES

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Canada Post Corporation

The Canadian Post Office concerns itself solely with the packaging of items, and not so much the actual contents. In regard to live fishes, they require that the fish be in proper fish bags (preferably double-bagged) which are in turn securely fastened with rubber bands. Use of twist-ties is discouraged, since they don't grip well and the sharp ends all too often puncture the bags. The shipping container preferred is a heavy, corrugated, cardboard box. This should be lined with absorbent material such as newspaper in case there is a leak, then lined with insulating material such as styrofoam. Labelling should be done in large, clear, black lettering, preferably with a waterproofed-ink, felt-tipped marker. They prefer that the return address be clear also. Other than this, all they are really concerned with is that the correct postage be paid. In all cases, it is better that live fish be sent by "Special Delivery."

Canada Customs

It is the function of Canada Customs to ensure that fish boxes coming in are full of fish and nothing else. They open shipments and inspect the contents, but nothing more, though it is their prerogative to confiscate suspect boxes. It is a fact that there are no knowledgeable hobbyists working for Customs--a fact I was able to ascertain. I doubt that any of their personnel could tell the difference between a Neon Tetra and a Nothobranchius killifish, let alone if the fish they were looking at were on the Endangered Species List or not. A customs officer is assigned to work with every main postal facility here. It is his/her duty to inspect all such packages coming into the country, but as long as the package/box contains no illegal contraband, they have no further interest in the contents. The same system operates at airport, bus, and border-crossing facilities. Interestingly, if fish are imported by mail and come Special Delivery, the shipment is delivered to your door while still unopened! It would seem that if the shipping label states the content of the box(es) is for "Biological Research," or some similar purpose, they do not even bother to inspect the contents. Why this is I was unable to determine. The concern of Canada Customs seems to be limited to preventing drugs and other more obvious contraband from entering Canada. Contraband fish are not on their list, since they wouldn't recognize them if they saw them.

Other

In Canada, legislation on fishes is more limited to commercial species which occur within our territorial boundaries. This includes salmon, bass, pikes, pickerel, etc. Special licenses are required by fish farmers, breeders that produce the young fish for restocking of public waterways, researchers, and, in some cases, casual fishermen. Commercial fishermen are licensed as business, which they are. It is illegal to keep any commercial species in your home aquarium without a special license which is almost impossible to get. A permit of this kind involves so much red tape, it isn't worth the hassle, as most people conclude. Again, there is special licensing needed to export. A permit or license of any kind, however, is not needed to import, even if it is a variety of fish that could survive our climate year-round, provided it cannot be classified as a food fish (commercial species). Therefore, anyone is free to keep and/or export native fishes such as minnows and sunfishes without a license or permit of any kind.

Postscript

Lastly, there is the matter of customs duty on fish. There is none! Generally, no value can be placed on ornamental fishes, and so a duty charge has never been established. This applies whether you're a dealer, a pet-store owner, or a private citizen. It's useful to keep in mind that a package of anything labelled "For Biological Research" is exempt from duty. If you are expecting fish from outside Canada, have the shipper write a line such as this on the shipping label, and there won't be any problems.
