

Shipping Fishes 101

by

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Scenario #1: You've just collected in the hidden, secret spot of your favorite fish. As usual, your eyes are bigger than your fish tank and you bring too many specimens home. You think about returning them from whence they came, but don't feel like taking another three-hour drive. Or . . .

Scenario #2: You're a master breeder and your favorite fish has spawned. Prolifically. Repeatedly. You have fry coming out your ears.

At first you panic. *What am I going to do with all these fish?* Then you dig out a NANFA Trading Post and hit upon the idea of sending them to A. Chubb in Eureka, California, who's been wanting this fish for years. And who just happens to have a bunch of aquatic plants *you've* been wanting for years. It's a match made in heaven. Fish heaven.

Unfortunately, you don't have the foggiest idea on how to ship live fish. Cross-country, no less. And neither does A. Chubb, who has only shipped plants.

Relax. Here's what to do.

Fish in Bags, Bags in Boxes

First off, get a box and some bags. If you have a good relationship with your local aquarium store (i.e., if you buy a lot of stuff there), they should be willing to spot you some plastic bags. If not, you can probably buy them for a nickel or so apiece. Fish shops also have a lot of empty Styrofoam boxes laying about, the kind they receive their fish shipments in. Politely offer to take one or two of them off their hands. (It doesn't hurt to be making a big purchase at this point, if you

can. Hey, what's a couple of free bags and boxes when you're buying \$81 worth of frozen bloodworms and super-premium designer activated carbon?)

If the fish shop isn't cooperative, stop by your local grocery or convenience store and get a box of freezer bags for \$1.29. Also, pick up a Styrofoam cooler for \$1.99. And while you're there, see if you can talk the manager into giving you a cardboard box. It might have "Pampers" printed on the side, but the fish won't care.

Either way, you're heading home with the right stuff. But still you're worried. *How can fish survive in such little bags in such a little box for such a long time? Am I sending my babies to their doom?*

Fear not. Fish can tolerate a box with little stress. (How do you suppose those tropicals got to the pet shop in the first place?)

Less Water = More Fish

You're ready to start packing. The first rule of packing is: Less water equals more fish! Fish do not breathe water, they breathe oxygen. If your bag is full of water and not air you will have a very heavy box of stinky water arriving in California and a soon-to-be very unhappy A. Chubb opening it up. So put just enough water in each bag to fully cover each fish. Then trap enough air in the bags so that they have a squishy, soft consistency. Trap too much air and a pressure change on the airplane might pop them open.

The second rule of packing is: More bags equals more fish. It is far better to have 15 small bags with

one fish apiece in them than two large bags with eight fish apiece. If a fish dies, you will limit the damage to its buddies if they are not in the bag with it.

Now that you've bagged the fish, place them in the Styrofoam box. Use newspaper to fill any holes and tape the box closed. I use two-inch wide packing tape, as it adds support to the box. Then place the whole thing inside that Pampers box you got at the store, once again using newspaper to fill the holes. Label the box and write "Live Fish" on the sides. Tape it shut and you are ready to go to the post office.

Why not UPS, FedEx, or one of the other carriers? Because they often do not allow the shipping of live animals, and because they are always more expensive.

At the Post Office

So you lug your large, ugly box up to the counter. The postal clerk says, "I'm sorry, but we can't ship *live* fish." You, however, have read this article and are prepared to reply:

"Ma'am, in the domestic mail manual, section 124.632, it states you can ship non-venomous, cold-

blooded animals via the post office." (By the way, the same regulations apply to shipping overseas. Just recite the same sentence, adding ". . . the international mail manual states in section 139.1 that the shipment of non-venomous . . .").

"Yes," she replies. "But how do I know these particular fish are cold-blooded?"

After a quick lesson in vertebrate physiology, she agrees to accept your package.

"So, how would you like it shipped?" she asks.

The best way to ship is Priority Mail. Most packages are there in two days, and you can't beat the price—just \$10-12. I have shipped fish all over the world using this method. Sometimes the fish have been in transit for as long as 14 days. The survival rate has always been higher than 80%.

Two days later you get a call from A. Chubb.

"Hey, thanks for the cool fish! They all survived! By the way, how old's your baby?"

"Baby?" you ask, laughing. "What makes you think I have a baby?"

"The box. Boy, you sure must go through a lot of Pampers!"

New publication

The Crayfishes of Missouri by William F. Pflieger

Missouri is home to 32 species of crayfish. These mostly nocturnal crustaceans play an important link in the food chain between plants and vertebrates by breaking down dead plant material that is resistant to decomposition. They also are an important food for many animals, such as fish, snakes, turtles, wading birds, raccoons and mink.

The Crayfishes of Missouri, published by the Missouri Department of Conservation, gives detailed information about the habits, habitats and home ranges of these important water-dwelling invertebrates. The extensive research used to develop this book was supported in part by the Sport Fish Restoration Fund.

Color photos, black-and-white drawings, location maps and the scientific key will aid the reader in identifying the many species found in Missouri's streams and lakes. This 152-page reference book should provide interesting information for anyone who is intrigued by these colorful aquatic arthropods.

Soft cover. Price \$7, plus \$2 shipping. Missouri residents add 44 cents for sales tax. Available from the Missouri Department of Conservation, Fiscal Division, Box 180, Jefferson City, Mo. 65102-0180.