

T r a n s p o r t i n g F i s h e s

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by

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If you collect fishes in the wild and must drive a considerable distance back to your home, then you know that the hardiest species survive while the more delicate fishes fall by the wayside (literally).

Some species have no problem surviving transport in a gallon milk jug, while others seem to require a “containerized, oxygen-enriched, and filtered life-support system,” transported via chartered aircraft, to make it home without going belly-up.

After much trial and error with coolwater species (mostly error), I’ve found a practical solution for minimizing fatalities while transporting fishes. It involves the following equipment:

- A 48-quart cooler (Igloo, Coleman, etc.).
- A small cork stopper to plug the inside of the cooler’s drain. This prevents the fish from being trapped in the small tube, and also prevents the accidental draining of the cooler if the external drain cap comes off.
- A 12-110v A.C. converter which plugs into the vehicle’s cigarette-lighter receptacle. Radio Shack and other sources sell these. They’re useful on long trips for camcorders, TVs, and other small appliances, too.
- A 110v aquarium air pump and gang valve, if needed, with the necessary lengths of air line tubing.
- A thermometer.
- A foam filter (Tetra, Jungle, Dirt Magnet, etc.).

After obtaining the above items, wash, rinse and fill the container with water, and test your equipment before taking it on the road.

The night before your trip, run a foam filter in an established, healthy tank that you have designated to receive the fish you’ll be collecting the next day. When

you get up in the morning, be sure to place it, soaking wet, into a sealed plastic bag and take it with you to the collecting site. It’s not necessary to fill the bag with water, as the wet foam will not dry out in the plastic bag.

Upon arrival to your collecting site, and after you have verified the presence of your intended species, fill the cooler with clean stream water about half-way up. Plug in your equipment and adjust the air flow to the foam filter. Congratulations, you now have a “containerized, oxygen-enriched, filtered life-support system”!

After collecting, gently place the fishes into the cooler and proceed to your next destination. Don’t seal the lid too tightly as this will cut off the flow of air through the air tubing. (If necessary, you can drill a small hole through the side of the cooler and insert a piece of rigid tubing. But then, you would have to drill another hole to give the excess air a place to vent.)

Also, make sure the cooler is properly positioned in the vehicle before hitting the road. The best position is with the handles towards the sides of the vehicle instead of the front and back. This keeps the sloshing and splashing of the water to a minimum as the vehicle accelerates and slows down.

This set-up will work even on extended trips—as long as you don’t overcrowd the fish. I once kept over 20 coolwater shiners in a cooler for nine days on a trip from Baker, Louisiana to Atlanta and back! I have also spent the night at motels, leaving the system running in my truck.

I’m happy to report that my battery always survived, and that my truck (a.k.a. the “minner transporter”) has always turned over in the morning.