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What should you do with the fish and aquatic plants in your tank that you no longer want? Don't release them in the wild.

Letting pets into wild harms native species

By ANNA MCCARTNEY
 Contributing writer

You might think you are doing the right thing by releasing your fish, reptile or other pet into the wild. Unfortunately, many of these species do survive and they become invasive.

Instead of thinking of the one fish or animal you might save, think of the numerous native fish or animals you are going to harm if you release these pets. Invasive species harm native fish, wildlife and invertebrate populations, reducing biodiversity. Released species often

outcompete native species and they have the ability to completely change the dynamics of natural ecosystems because they:

- Degrade aquatic habits.
- Crowd out native species.
- Decrease biodiversity.
- Alter food chains.
- Introduce diseases.
- Limit recreation.
- Damage infrastructure.
- Contaminate water resources.

ANNA MCCARTNEY, a communications and education specialist for Pennsylvania Sea Grant, can be reached by e-mail at axm40@psu.edu.



ANNA MCCARTNEY/Contributed photo

Having live plants and animals in the classroom or at home is a valuable teaching tool. But be sure to include lessons about native and invasive species, local food webs, biodiversity and the negative impacts of releasing live specimens into the wild.

Sink, then swim

Dumping aquariums into wild hurts marine life

By ANNA MCCARTNEY
 Contributing writer

Do you know what to do with unwanted aquarium plants and animals?

Whatever you do, don't release them into the wild! Don't even dump them down the toilet because they may still find their way into a body of water, survive and become invasive.

Fish, aquatic plants, crayfish, snails, salamanders, turtles, frogs, crabs, worms and insects are released into the wild regularly with devastating consequences. Once introduced, these plants and animals, and the patho-

gens or parasites they carry, disrupt ecosystems, negatively impact water quality, reduce biodiversity and cost communities huge amounts of time, money, resources and lost revenue.

About a third of all aquatic invasive species (AIS), which currently threaten marine environments, were released into the wild from home and classroom aquariums. A survey of 2,000 teachers from the United States and Canada found that one out of four of them released live organisms after their lessons were completed. Many more people release

their home pets when they get too big for their tanks or they tire of caring for them.

If you are faced with the dilemma of what to do with unwanted aquarium plants and animals, what should you do? Never release them into the wild under any circumstances. Do the following instead:

- Ask seller about possible returns.
- Give/trade with another aquarium owner, pond owner, or water gardener, or donate to a local aquarium society or school.
- Avoid using live animals in the classroom unless permanent homes can

be found ahead of time. ■ Completely dry or freeze unwanted aquatic plants and discard in the trash (not the compost bin).

■ If all else fails, contact your veterinarian or pet retailer about humane disposal.

■ Pour aquarium water on dry land instead of a storm drain, sink or toilet.

■ Share this information with your friends, family and teachers.

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CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

Members of the John Horan Garden Apartments Green Team and Gannon students participate in the PA Lake Erie International Coastal Cleanup together.

Green Team, partners clean up neighborhood

We cleaned up around our neighborhood at East 10th Street and Tacoma Road, the Kids Club and McDannell Run. Twenty kids from the Green Team worked with students from Gannon University and the staff at the John E. Horan Garden Apartments. There were 50 of us all together. We picked up 38.5 pounds of recyclables and 310 pounds of trash — it was disgusting!

Some of the things we picked up were 1,018 cig-

rette butts, 333 recyclable bottles or cans, 151 plastic bags and 111 cups and plates.

"We don't know why people are hurting the Earth. We think they are rude, lazy and disrespectful. We should all care for the Earth. The Earth will be much healthier if we clean it up and don't litter."

— Asad, age 7;
 Khazali, age 10;
 Rahniyah, age 7;
 Messiah, age 9;
 and Catoure, age 7



NOAA

More than 13 million households maintain aquariums, and businesses such as medical offices and restaurants can account for thousands more.



KARLA KACZMAREK/Contributed photo

Pa Sea Grant's Sara Stahlman reminds people that goldfish are not native in our area. Releasing any pets into the wild could have harm native species.



WIKIPEDIA COMMONS

A common pathway for the introduction and spread of aquatic nuisance species like this red-eared slider is through home and classroom pet/science project releases.



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When non-native aquarium plants like this Eurasian watermilfoil are released into the environment, they can form dense mats that clog waterways and displace native aquatic species.

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Check out these websites to learn more:

- www.habitattitude.net
- www.iiseagrant.org/NabInvader
- www.protectyourwaters.net
- www.paseagrant.org/topics/invasive-species/

Hunting and fishing articles can often be found in the sports section. Do you or does someone in your family hunt or fish?

Do more research about invasive species by checking out the referenced websites on today's page. Share your ideas of what we should be doing to keep invasive species from destroying native species and habitat.

Send them to axm40@psu.edu for possible publication in the weekly "your space" feature.

