

Fish Disease Alert

In the late nineteen-nineties, the koi world was shocked by the discovery of Koi Herpes Virus. When Dr. Myron Kebus made the discovery that the newest disease outbreak was a form of a virus, he was greeted with skepticism, because the popular belief was, that koi were not susceptible to viruses. Now, several years later, we are aware that this disease is a form of virus, and have established effective quarantine procedures to address the disease. Looking back however, it seemed as though the world of koi keeping was going to change forever.

Since KHV affected only Cyprinid fish, and since it appeared that, in the U.S., at least, these fish were restricted to the koi hobby, the USDA, the department which regulates the fishing industry, was not too concerned. There were rumors in Japan that carp escaped into the wild, and the KHV spread to the native carp population, but these rumors could never be substantiated.

Several years ago, Spring Viremia in Carp was reported in the wild in the U.S... Since this disease is often as virulent as KHV, and since it was detected in the wild, the USDA became very concerned. Several fish farms were found to contain Spring Viremia, and the USDA shut these facilities down, and enacted a very thorough sterilization procedure to ensure that the Spring Viremia was eradicated. In addition, these farms implemented a rigorous quarantine protocol to ensure that their farms would not contract this disease in the future.

Last year, a new threat emerged in the Great Lakes region, known as Viral Hemorrhagic Septicemia. This disease originated in wild salmonid populations, but was confined to the Western States. Unfortunately, this virus mutated, and is now able to infect other species of fish. Mortality rates for this disease run as high as eighty to ninety percent (which is similar to KHV), but since it affects fish in the wild, can lead to massive die-offs in fish population.

The USDA, as of last November, has placed a ban on the interstate transport of game fish in the Great Lakes Region. In plain English, it is now illegal to transport ANY game or bait fish from one state to the next. This means, for example, that you CANNOT transport fingerlings grown in Wisconsin and stock them in a lake in Illinois. You also CANNOT transport bait fish (minnows) from one state to the next. In

fact, the USDA is thinking about imposing limits on transporting game and bait fish in INTRA-state waterways.

This is a serious matter. The USDA is concerned that VHS can be introduced into previously unaffected waters, causing large fish kills into these areas. Since these fish can be used for human consumption (we are talking about gamefish and commercial fisheries), the concerns of the USDA are warranted.

Now comes the part that **may** affect the koi and goldfish hobby. Many of the farms that raise game and bait fish also raise koi and goldfish. The USDA is currently working with fish farms and dealers in developing methods to address these problems. These methods will likely include new quarantine procedures, new methods to isolate water on farms from water in natural lakes and rivers, and destruction of fish found to either have the disease or which act as carriers of the disease.

The effects on our hobby might be profound. If we look back to the 1990's, we can remember that the hobby was filled with gloom and doom scenarios. These scenarios turned out to be wrong – we adapted, and eventually saw improvements to quarantine methods and better fish health. As hobbyists, we need to work with the USDA, specially-trained veterinarians, and fish farms and dealers to ensure that new quarantine methods are developed and enforced. We need to stand by the dealer community as these methods are tested and developed, especially since they will initially bear the brunt of the cost that will be required to ensure not only the safety of our hobby – but of human lives as well. Finally, we need to provide forums for the USDA to get its message out to interested parties and the public at large, and to enable us to combat this problem.