

## Keeping Rare Fish Species

**Know what fish you're buying before you make a purchase.**

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Cardinal tetras represent an important source of income for local fishermen who collect them in the wild. In this case, I think it is best to purchase wild-caught specimens to support the local trade in wild-caught fishes. A lot of the species we keep in aquaria are ubiquitous in the wild. Cardinal tetras, for example, are very numerous in their native habitat and a lot of local fishermen depend on the market for these fish.

Without this commercial resource, it is likely that many of these farmers would be forced to engage in environmentally destructive practices to feed their families. Because of this, where a fishery is sustainable, I believe aquarists should support local fishermen and buy wild-caught fishes.

But not all fisheries are sustainable. Many, in fact, are in rapid decline. Consider the plight of the northern and southern blue fin tuna. Both species are on the fast track to extinction in the wild if commercial fishing practices aren't changed.

### Complex Considerations

This question of sustainability makes selecting livestock difficult if an aquarist is concerned about the environmental impact of the aquarium hobby.

To make matters worse, it generally isn't possible to identify whether a species was collected in a sustainable manner. A few private organizations exist, such as the Marine Aquarium Council (MAC), that certify species as "sustainably caught," but this hasn't always proved effective.

International regulations, such as the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), also serve to protect species, but the process of adding species is somewhat cumbersome and in many cases the protections offered by CITES prove ineffective.

In cases where we can't determine the sustainability of a specific fishery, I believe we should err on the side of caution and seek out captive-bred specimens of the fish we seek.

### An Example

Consider the galaxy rasbora (or celestial pearl danio), a very attractive species that made its aquarium hobby debut in 2007. Initially, exporters and importers went nuts shipping these little guys around the world.

Soon thereafter, reports filtered in that the native Myanmar habitat of the galaxy rasbora was being decimated by fish collectors and that the fish was becoming difficult to find in the wild.

Myanmar authorities quickly banned export of the fish. Since then additional galaxy rasbora habitats have been found.

Most of the galaxy rasboras in the trade were wild-caught. Now that the initial furor for this attractive species has died down, it is much more difficult to find them in local fish stores. Some online vendors carry them, but availability is sporadic in my experience.

Still, wild-caught galaxy rasboras can still be found in the trade. In the case of this fish, it is important to find captive-bred specimens.

### The Onus Falls on Aquarists

With species like the galaxy rasbora, it is the responsibility of fishkeepers to identify the origins of the fishes they purchase.

This means that, in addition to researching the care requirements of the fishes you intend to purchase, you should also find out where specific vendors are getting their fishes.

Sometimes it's better both from an economic standpoint and a conservationist standpoint to buy wild-caught fishes. But

under certain circumstances where fisheries are not sustainable, aquarists should seek out captive-bred specimens.

This can be done for the galaxy rasbora. Captive-bred specimens do exist. I'm currently looking around for captive-bred galaxy rasboras, and when I'm ready to buy some, I'm confident I'll be able to find some captive-bred specimens.

I think we as aquarists should go a little bit farther, though. When I do purchase some captive-bred galaxy rasboras, I intend to do my utmost to breed this species and make them available to other hobbyists.

The more we breed endangered species (especially freshwater species that are easier to breed in captivity), the less impact our hobby will have and the more sustainable it will be.

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