

Marines that become monsters

Nathan Hill explains that some marine aquarium cuties

grow into fish that should never have left the high seas.

The marine fishkeeping fraternity has grown considerably over the last few years, thanks to the arrival of easier to use equipment that's accessible and fairly priced.

The momentum within the trade looks set to continue too, as more and more enthusiasts strive to bring creatures from 'the great unknown' into their home aquaria.

However, some of these animals should be left in the oceans. Sizes of fish should always be fully understood prior to purchase — and nothing should ever be bought on a whim.

It is arguable that the big fish issue is more prevalent in the marine than freshwater hobby — and certainly the salt-free world has more than its fair share of tank inhabitants that are destined to stay smaller.

To make matters worse, some fish we see for sale are pelagic — happiest roaming vast ocean waters. The Remora, for example, hitches a ride on seafaring sharks, travelling stupendous distances over just one day, let alone its lifetime. Conditions like these are not replicable for the home aquarist, and fish like these should never appear at any stage of the aquarium trade, yet we still encounter keepers who genuinely think they have the space to cater for them.

Ultimately, this is a fish that even large public aquaria become twitchy about.

The biggest danger is in the charming appeal of juvenile marine fishes. Take the Panther grouper. When young, this fish has the most captivating Dalmatian-type spots on its body. However, these eventually lose their dazzle and before you know it you're lumbered with a fish

measuring more than 50cm/20" that predates on anything it can fit into its mouth.

Juvenile Batfish, too, have the most unusual shape and colours when very young — only to become gigantic, silver, heavysset fish in later life.

Taking on any livestock is more than just an act of collecting and keeping alive. When buying a fish, you take on the responsibility for that animal's wellbeing for the remainder of its life.

It's not enough to plead ignorance at a later date when you're unable to cater for your fast-growing charges.

Research any fish thoroughly before making any purchase, and do the right thing. If it's not within your capabilities then don't buy, however cute it may look.

Here's an at-a-glance illustration of the sizes some prized 'pet' marine fish can grow to....

70%

Of the world's marine fish stocks are in crisis. Whimsically buying fish you cannot keep only fuels this problem. Always shop wisely.

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