

Lesson: CITES & Asian Arowana

CITES & ASIAN AROWANAS THE HISTORY/DEVELOPMENT

The term CITES (Convention On International Trade In Endangered Species Of Wild Fauna And Flora) had been associated with Asian Arowanas since 1980. The purpose of CITES is to prevent excessive international trade in specific endangered species. However, it also recognize the moderate consumption of these species and seeks to promote balanced use, without compromising the wild population. Species that are depleted in the wild due to over fishing, like the Asian Arowanas, cause a lot of concern over their survival. Since population drops in the wild, fewer males and females will have the chance to meet one another to breed. In time to come, they do not have much choice but to in-breed, hence, creating more birth defects and deformities. This will result in a vicious cycle, accelerating the extinction of this wonderful species.

It all started with the IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature) proposals in 1972 in Sweden Stockholm. It was recommended that a meeting of appropriate governments or agencies be called at the earliest time in order to draw up and adopt a treaty pertaining to the import, export and transportation of wild flora and fauna. This had led to Kenya and the U.S. to hold a convention in Washington in 1973, hence, The Washington Convention. The result was that 72 countries signed a long agreement that went into effect on July 1, 1975.

In 1980, the Asian Arowanas of gold, red and green varieties were listed as a highest level protected fish in the CITES Appendix I (see next page for CITES Article II). Under the Appendix I, the Asian Arowanas are regarded as fishes 'threatened with extinction'. Fishing and catching of these fishes from its place of origin is strictly prohibited.

In 1989, however, at a meeting in Switzerland, CITES deleted the Asian Arowanas from Appendix I and include them under Appendix II instead. Under Appendix II, the fish is described as 'not necessarily now threatened with extinction' but may become so unless trading is subject to strict regulation.

Hence, only captive-bred fishes are allowed to be exported from a single farm in Indonesia. Wild caught fishes are not allowed to be exported. Maximum length is 15cm. These figures, although meant for the whole world, were exported mainly to Japan for ornamental use. The maximum quota of annual export is as follows.

1990 - 1250 fishes

1991 - 1500 fishes

1992 - 2500 fishes

1993 - 3000 fishes

1994 - 4000 fishes

In 1994, in Florida, U.S., at the request of Indonesia, Asian Arowanas were once again, included in Appendix I as a 'species threatened with extinction' but trade quotas are not necessary so long as trading is conducted in accordance to the provisions of the 'strict regulation'. In

that same year, one farm in Singapore and another in Malaysia, applied for their farms to be included in the CITES Secretariat, thereby allowing them to export F2 and beyond captive bred specimens. Thus, these two farms were among the first to be registered as CITES farms.

Each time a farm is registered with the CITES Secretariat, a letter known as 'Notification To The Parties' will be faxed and mailed to all member countries. This is done so as to inform the respective country's Fishery Department or any other government appointed agency, that only F2 and beyond, captive bred fishes from these authorised farms are allowed to be imported into their country. A special registration number will also be assigned to each and every farm concerned, for Dragon Fish Industry, it is A-SG-507. Make sure you get the breeder to quote you this registration number as to confirm whether his farm is included in the CITES Secretariat. The minimum size of export is 15cm since they need to be microchip tagged when they are around 12-15cm. Most breeders will know that tagging a fish below 10cm will entail a minimal amount of risk, hence, they will often tag their fish just before export, which by that time, is at least 15cm in total length.