

## Speak Out Against Goldfish Giveaways



The decision to have a companion animal is a serious responsibility, which requires planning and a commitment to their long-term care. It should not be based on how well you can toss a ping pong ball into a bowl. Goldfish are living, feeling creatures, just like any other animal. Even though we don't pet them, or play with them in the yard, we still have a responsibility to properly care for them. The lack of concern with which goldfish are given away at fairs and carnivals conveys a wanton

disrespect for the value of the lives of these animals, and an indifference to their suffering. Goldfish are often won by children without a parent having any knowledge that they will be bringing home a live animal that, with proper care, can live for at least 25 years.

## **Improper Care**

Because goldfish can be obtained very cheaply, vendors treat them like disposable commodities. According to one person who runs a fish distribution game, he gives away between 4,000 and 7,000 fish a week.<sup>1</sup> After events with goldfish contests, bags of goldfish are often found tossed in the garbage. And in some cases, when the fair closes, the remaining goldfish are thrown in the dumpster by the vendor.<sup>2</sup>

While goldfish can survive quite a lot of abuse, they endure a great deal before making it to someone's home. They often start their lives in overcrowded, dirty tanks full of parasites. They then have to go through the stress of being moved to a dealer before being transported to the event. Once they are won by a contestant, they are carried around for an extended period of time in a small plastic bag before finally arriving at their new

home. The vibrations caused by the drive home are stressful for the goldfish. It breaks down their immune system, which can promote disease and result in death.<sup>3</sup> Once the excitement of having this animal fades, the fish will often end up being neglected.<sup>4</sup>



## **Proper Care**

Goldfish won at a carnival are usually thought of more as a prize than as a pet. When a person brings home a goldfish from a carnival they have

not planned for them and are not equipped to properly care for this animal.<sup>5</sup> Goldfish can die from being put in chlorinated tap water, as well as from water that is bottled or distilled. In order to properly care for the fish, a solution needs to be purchased that removes chlorine, measures acidity, and adds nutrients and minerals. In addition, the water should remain at about 70 degrees, and a filtering system should be placed in the fish's tank to remove waste; otherwise, the fish could die from the ammonia in their waste.<sup>6</sup> The sad reality is that people who win goldfish as prizes neither have the proper home set up for them, nor ever create such a home. Moreover, goldfish are social animals who normally swim in shoals. Keeping a fish solitary can be cruel to the fish. In Switzerland, it is illegal to keep goldfish alone.<sup>7</sup>

## **Laws**

Some states do have laws in place to ban giving away live animals at fairs and carnivals. In Maryland, it is unlawful to give away a live animal as a prize without approval from the Secretary of Agriculture. Doing so is a misdemeanor, punishable by up to \$500 (Maryland Code, section 10-610).<sup>8</sup>

Iowa, Massachusetts, South Carolina, and Vermont have also made giving away goldfish at carnivals a criminal offense.<sup>2</sup> It has also been made illegal in other parts of the world, such as in Liverpool, England.<sup>9</sup>

## **Environmental Concerns**

Laws banning the giving away of goldfish as prizes are not created solely out of compassion for the goldfish. After the novelty of bringing home a fish wears off, they are frequently discarded either in local waters, or flushed down the toilet, in which case they often end up in public waters. The consequences can be profound.

When goldfish are given enough space, such as in local waters, they can grow up to two feet and live for more than 25 years. Goldfish are a member of the carp family, and in the wild they often breed with other carp. These fish can carry diseases which can infect native fish.

Released goldfish also compete for resources with native fish, and may even eat native fish eggs. Through excessive breeding and voracious eating habits, they have been known to disrupt native species, which harms local ecosystems. This

damage can include eating tadpoles, which in turn causes the elimination of frogs from a region. Goldfish also stir up sediment on river beds, deteriorating the water quality.<sup>11</sup> The harm caused by released goldfish can be so severe that some states, such as Minnesota, have made it illegal to discard goldfish in public waters (including flushing them down the toilet).<sup>10</sup>

## **Oppose Live Animals As Prizes**

If you know of an event where animals are to be awarded as prizes, contact the organizers and explain why it should not be allowed. Find out if there are regulations or other restrictions on the practice. (If you need help with this, please contact Fish Feel.) Try to enlist others to join you in protesting it. Your voice can be powerful. For example, because of all the calls that the New York State Fair received from citizens concerned about the welfare of goldfish being given away, the Fair decided to prohibit contests that gave away goldfish.<sup>12</sup> If the fairs persist in allowing such contests, contact the event sponsors to express your disapproval.

If you attend an event and find that fish are being used as prizes, contact the local humane society to request they check on the conditions in which the fish are being kept. Try to document the conditions, such as with your cell phone camera.

If you cannot get the practice stopped entirely, an alternative to suggest to the event organizers is for contest winners to instead be given a certificate to receive a fish at a local store that sells them. This gives people the time to properly decide whether fish would be a good addition to their household, and to purchase the proper equipment, as well as learn what is involved in having companion fish. This method is currently carried out at the California State Fair, following public outcry over live animals being given away as prizes.<sup>13</sup>

Also, if a fair or carnival wants to have a fishbowl toss, encourage the organizers to have one that does not exploit actual fish. The links below show several alternatives.

[http://www.carnivalsavers.com/fish\\_bowl\\_toss\\_carnival\\_game.html](http://www.carnivalsavers.com/fish_bowl_toss_carnival_game.html)

<http://blog.capscreations.com/2010/04/diy-fish-bowl-carnival-game.html>

Lastly, write or call companies that sell fish to be used in carnival games, and let them know why you are opposed to this practice.

<http://www.ozarkkoi.com/Koi-And-Goldfish-Games-c-252.html>

## **Companion Fish**

If you want to have companion fish and can provide an appropriate home for them, please obtain them from an animal shelter or fish rescue organization. Such organizations often have fish that are obtained from cruelty cases, and who are waiting to be adopted. Doing an Internet search for "goldfish rescue" brings up numerous organizations. As with other companion animals, please do not purchase fish from commercial sellers, as the live fish industry is rife with abuses and animal suffering.

**Fish Feel**

[www.FishFeel.org](http://www.FishFeel.org)



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- 3. So You Won A Carnival Goldfish...The Basics Of Goldfish Care, My Aquarium Club, by KK F,**  
<https://www.myaquariumclub.com/so-you-won-a-carnival-goldfish...the-basics-of-goldfish-care-5613.html>
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**9. Fairground goldfish banned, The ZGuardian, Helen Carter, October 21, 2003,**  
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**11. The Great Goldfish Invasion: How an Exotic Carp Took Over America, The Atlantic, Katrina Gulliver, November 1, 2012,**  
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