

# ARE YOU A PET OWNER? DON'T LET IT LOOSE!

Owning a pet or an aquarium can be an exciting and fulfilling time in our lives – but it also comes with responsibility!

**Domestic pets like fishes, invertebrates, aquatic plants, reptiles, amphibians, or mammals can become invasive when released into natural environments.**

Released pets can harm natural ecosystems by spreading disease, outcompeting native species for resources, preying on native species, and contributing to habitat destruction. When a pet is released for compassionate reasons, not only is the ecological integrity of that ecosystem being jeopardized, but the pet may not be able to adapt to the new environment leading to a potentially tragic death because of their inability to cope with natural conditions such as temperature, food availability, or predators.

Pet owners bear the difficult responsibility of seeing their animals through to the end of their lives.

## **Some of the ecological impacts of pet release include:**

- Changing native species composition and diversity in a landscape resulting in altered ecosystem functions.
- Causing infection, wounding, introducing parasites, or killing native species.
- Eliminating or greatly reducing species populations that are only found in one geographic location (endemic).
- Reducing biodiversity by outcompeting native species.
- Reducing critical habitats that species at risk need to survive.

## **What is an invasive species and why can my pet become invasive?**

Invasive species pose ecological, social, and economic challenges by accelerating biodiversity loss and altering the composition of natural ecological structures. Species can become invasive when they are introduced to new environments outside of their natural range, potentially leading to negative impacts where newly introduced.

Examples of exotic species or pets that can become invasive when released into the wild include Goldfish, Red-Eared Sliders, Yellow Floating Heart, Red Swamp Crayfish, and even Zebra Mussel and Quagga Mussel.



# CONSIDERATIONS BEFORE BUYING A PET

Ensure that ponds and aquariums are contained and have no potential to unintentionally release species into the wild. Be mindful that any water released from aquariums, ponds or water gardens is done on land and away from household drains, sewers, or other bodies of water.

Research the species prior to purchasing it and know information related to whether it is legal to own it in Canada, if the seller is a reputable retailer, the pet's life expectancy, and the necessary care requirements to care for the pet. If you don't plan to keep the pet to the end of its life, ensure you are able to rehome it.

When disposing of your pet or plant, ensure that it is done with caution. If your pet dies, don't flush it down the toilet; bury it instead so it can't spread disease. Dry and freeze plants in tightly sealed bags before throwing them in the trash and do not compost them. Try to choose a native species as a precautionary measure.

Be aware of the ethical commitment of pet ownership. Pet ownership bears the responsibility of caring for another living being, which is a serious obligation. Take the time to decide the right pet for you or your family to care for.

## NEW PET CHECKLIST:

- ✓ Have you researched your pet? Are you aware of their expected lifestyle and are you prepared if the pet behaves differently than you expect?
- ✓ Is the seller reputable?
- ✓ Is the pet captive-bred or wild caught? Captive-bred pets are more appropriate for a novice keeper.
- ✓ Do you know the requirements of your new pet to thrive under your care?
- ✓ Do you have the time to keep up with the daily maintenance levels required by this pet?
- ✓ What is the life expectancy of the pet? Are you able to care for this pet throughout its expected lifespan?
- ✓ Are you prepared to provide the necessary care requirements for the full estimated lifespan of the pet?
- ✓ Do you have other commitments like employment or family that may make it difficult to own a pet?
- ✓ Does your lifestyle give you the financial means necessary to care for the pet?
- ✓ Are you prepared to cover routine and emergency veterinary expenses?
- ✓ Do you have or are you able to purchase all the accessories that are necessary for owning your pet?
- ✓ Do you have friends or family who are able to care for your pet in the event that you are not able to?
- ✓ Do you have space for your pet in your home? Are you aware of and prepared for the growth of your pet?
- ✓ Is this pet legal to keep in Canada and your jurisdiction?



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