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FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife

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FEATURE MATERIAL

EXPERIMENTS WITH GRASS CARP FROM MALAYSIA MAY AID UNITED STATES FISH PONDS

The Department of the Interior is keeping a close watch on the feeding habits of 27 small imported fish which reportedly prefer a diet of grass and other water vegetation to insects and competing fish. Researchers hope the foreign fish, known as grass carp, live up to their reputation.

Imported to the United States almost a year ago from their native Malaysia, the grass carp might be propagated in the United States to help fight vegetation in the thousands of farm ponds where production of game fish is restricted by excessive weed growth, the Department said.

The Malaysian grass carp are being studied at experimental ponds managed by the Fish and Wildlife Service's Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife at Stuttgart, Ark.

In selecting this carp, scientists point out that excessive vegetation in farm ponds provides too much escape cover for small fish, which are the main source of food for larger fish. Heavy weed growth also impedes navigation and the harvest of desirable fish. Herbicides could be used to eliminate weeds, but this approach is considered too costly and also might prove hazardous to fish. Thus, the importation of the test group of grass carp.

The Bureau says it has much to learn about the species before it would recommend its use in this country. Even if the grass carp proves its worth at keeping vegetation out of test ponds, its ability to reproduce will be studied in carefully controlled experiments. The Bureau also wishes to know the effects the grass carp would have on other species of fish and on desirable waterfowl foods.

James H. Stevenson, Chief of the Fish Farming Experimental Station at Stuttgart, said Malaysian fishery scientists report they have been unable to spawn grass carp in ponds there.

Stevenson believes spawning might be induced by adding fresh water to the test ponds and by injecting hormones, if necessary.

"Up until 15 years ago," he said, "it was believed impossible to spawn our native buffalo fish in ponds, but the introduction of fresh water into ponds resulted in successful spawning."

Fishery scientists are not sure why the introduction of fresh water will help induce spawning. Some think it may give the fish confidence that there will be an adequate water supply for the survival of their young.

The 27 grass carp at Stuttgart are the survivors of 70 fingerlings sent to the experiment station by air in plastic bags last year by the Malaysian Director of Fisheries.

The fingerlings, then less than an inch long, survived their trip and were divided among indoor aquaria and an outdoor pond. They were fed fish meal and canned spinach during the winter. About half the indoor group survived; only one in the outdoor pond was lost.

Survivors are now about 16 inches long and weighs about two pounds. They are fed high protein fish meal, supplemented occasionally with a handfull of grass.

The grass carp has smaller scales and a more elongated body than his cousin, the German carp, which was imported to the United States nearly a century ago as a food fish and now is generally held in low esteem by sport fishermen.

The German carp reproduces rapidly, muddies water, and retards the growth of plants needed for oxygen replenishment of water and competes for food with some species more desired by sportsmen.

If the grass carp begins displaying any of these traits, he'll be rejected by the Stuttgart researchers.

Stevenson said the grass carp is active and might be a good game fish. As far as now known, it does not feed on other fish.

A recent report from England said 15,000 grass carp are being used successfully to prevent weeds from clogging water inlets at an electric power station at Barrow-in-Furness. British scientists have not yet been learned if the fish will spawn there.

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