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P.E.I. wildlife staff remove more than 200 goldfish from Winter River pond

[: Journalist](#) | Posted: Sept. 22, 2021, 5:30 p.m. | Updated: Sept. 23, 2021, 11:16 a.m. | 5 Min Read



Rosie MacFarlane, freshwater fisheries biologist for the province, says goldfish recovered from Winter River were quite large and were likely in a someone's backyard pond before showing up in the watershed. - Contributed

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PLEASANT GROVE, P.E.I. — The discovery of more than 200 goldfish in a Queens County river has fish and wildlife officials reminding Islanders not to release their pets into the wild.

[In a Facebook post](#), Fish and Wildlife P.E.I. asked pet owners to refrain from releasing their unwanted fish into waterways after staff pulled 220 goldfish out of a pond on the Winter River Sept. 21.

Rosie MacFarlane, freshwater fisheries biologist for the province, said she was not sure how the goldfish got to the river, but believed they could have been from someone's backyard pond.



UPDATE (September 23, 2021):

Fish & Wildlife understands that some Facebook users were unsettled by the images in September 22nd's post. The exotic, invasive fish were euthanized using a sharp blow to the head by fisheries professionals.

ORIGINAL POST: Yesterday, Fish & Wildlife staff removed 220 goldfish from a single pool in a river in Queens County. We would like to remind Islanders that goldfish and other non-native fish should never be released into waterways. They ca... [See more](#)



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"It's a lot of fish to be in an aquarium, so its got to be from somewhere bigger than that," she said, noting the fish were quite large.

Finding an invasive species such as goldfish in an Island waterway is problematic, said MacFarlane, as they can sometimes bring diseases and parasites into the water habitats.

"There is also the competition factor, these fish are taking up space and eating food our native species are looking for," she said.



Non-native fish can bring new diseases and parasites to Island rivers and waterways, said Rosie MacFarlane, freshwater fisheries biologist for the province. As per protocol, when an invasive species is caught, it is then euthanized. - Contributed

“Then there is the nuisance factor. If you get a lot of these fish in a pond for instance, they may root around in the mud looking for food and create turbid conditions.”

The goldfish, which had been in the river for at least a month, were captured by electrofishing, which uses a generator to send electricity into the water to stun or impair fish in the area.

MacFarlane said after the goldfish were caught, they were euthanized as per protocol.

Other fish in the water:

While finding more than 200 goldfish in an Island river is not common, this isn't the first time Fish and Wildlife staff have removed non-native fish from Island waterways:

- In 2017, a koi fish which was believed to be a pet was [removed from Morell River](#).
- In 2018, another koi fish was found in the Harper Road Brook when a local watershed worker mistook it for a bouy.

This is the largest pull they've had, said MacFarlane.

"We haven't had a lot of places to deal with something like this," she said. "It's common in certain places where you would have a pond, for example in Victoria Park's Dead Man's Pond. In the past, there have been goldfish in there, places like there where people find them convenient to dump them."

Goldfish can also present unique issues for native species, as they can grow quite large, said Tracy Brown, executive director of the [Bedeque Bay Environmental Management Association \(BBEMA\)](#).

"The biggest issue is they will prey on native fish species," she said.

Those thinking of getting fish as a pet need to consider what they will do with them when they either can't take care of them, or no longer want to.

"These fish can live a very long time, and they are a big responsibility, they are a living thing. - Rosie MacFarlane

"All goldfish are carp, and if you leave carp in an area long enough, they will grow to a humongous size and will prey on other fish."

While BBEMA hasn't had any similar issues with invasive species in their waterways, Brown said she wouldn't be surprised if other goldfish from the captured group got away beforehand.

"This pond is likely connected to other waterways, and usually when you throw a fish in a pond, they don't tend to stay in that pond," she said. "(Fish and Wildlife) took these fish out, but there is a good chance there's more that have migrated out of this water system."

While no other goldfish could be seen in the area, MacFarlane said they are planning to return in case there are more.

"We are going to go back in a week's time and repeat what we have already done," she said. "They can get under rocks, the concrete and so on where they can hide. We didn't see any left when we finished, but I would not be surprised at all if over the next few days a few more show up."

MacFarlane said those thinking of getting fish as a pet need to consider what they will do with them when they either can't take care of them, or no longer want to.

"These fish can live a very long time, and they are a big responsibility, they are a living thing," she said. "If you are no longer able to fulfil that, then you have to find options to deal with them. Releasing them into the wild is not a good option."

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