Interior Secretary Proposes Ban on Importation of Snakehead Fish

Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton announced a proposal to ban importation and interstate transportation of live snakeheads in the United States. Snakeheads are voracious fish indigenous to Asia, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Africa. Norton’s proposal would add the family of snakeheads, comprised of 28 species, to the Federal list of “injurious wildlife” under the Lacey Act, which authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to list nonindigenous wild animals deemed to be “injurious, or potentially injurious, to the health and welfare of people as well as to the interests of agriculture, forestry, and horticulture, or to the welfare or survival of wildlife or wildlife resources of the United States.”

“These fish are like something from a bad horror movie,” said Secretary Norton. “A number of these species can survive in the wild in freshwater almost anywhere in the United States. They can eat virtually any small animal in their path. They can travel across land and live out of water for at least three days. They reproduce quickly. We simply must do everything we can to prevent them from entering our waters, either accidentally or intentionally.”

Three species of the fish have been found in open waters in California, Florida, Hawaii, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island. Thirteen states currently prohibit possession of live snakeheads; nevertheless, there is continuing evidence of illegal activity involving these fish even in states where they are prohibited.

No federal law now prohibits the importation of snakeheads. If the proposed rule is adopted, inspectors will have the authority to stop and seize shipments of live snakehead fish or their viable eggs. Under the proposal, live snakeheads or their eggs could be imported or transported across state lines by permit only for scientific, medical, educational, or zoological purposes.

Snakeheads are widely available. They are sold in live food fish markets and some restaurants in Boston and New York, where the fish are legal. Snakeheads have also been sold through some aquarium fish retailers via the internet. Biologists believe that the availability of the snakehead increases the probability of more releases into open water, and of the real possibility that the snakehead could become established in waterways stretching from Florida to the Canadian border.

Future Meetings

The inaugural meeting of the International Biogeography Society (IBS) – “Frontiers of Biogeography” – will be held at the Oasis Resort, Mesquite, Nevada on 4-8 January 2003. With this meeting, IBS will be launched as an international and interdisciplinary society contributing to the advancement of all studies of the geography of nature. Biogeography is now broadly recognized as a unifying field that provides a holistic understanding of the relationships between the earth and its biota. Our abilities to develop more general theories of the diversity of life and to conserve biological diversity may well rest on insights from the field of biogeography. IBS was founded as a non-profit organization in 2000. The meeting environment will maximize opportunities for biogeographers from a wide range of disciplines to interact with one another. Biogeographers from around the world will deliver invited oral presentations, organized into five symposia (Dynamics of Species Diversity, Phylogeography and Diversification, Paleobiogeography, Biogeography of the Sea, and Biogeography Theory and Conservation Practice). Meeting participants are also invited to submit titles and abstracts for contributed poster presentations. The contributed posters will be an integral part of the meeting, equal in their importance to the invited symposia. To contribute a poster, an abstract must be submitted no later than 1 October 2002. Visit the IBS Website <http://www.biogeography.org> for additional information on the society and the meeting.
CURRENT LITERATURE


Heiduck, S. 2002. The use of disturbed and undisturbed forest by masked titi monkeys Callicebus personatus melanochir is proportional to food availability. Oryx 36(2):133-139.


Jeganathan, P., Green, R.E., Bowden, C.G.R., Norris, K., Pain, D., and Rahmani, A. 2002. Use of tracking strips and auto-
matic cameras for detecting Critically Endangered Jerdon’s coursers Rhinoptilus bitorquatus in scrub jungle in Andhra Pradesh, India. Oryx 36(2):182-188.


Turner, C., and Raines, P. 2002. Rebel army need not be a bar-


