

Animal activists brace for "Finding Dory" impact on tropical fish

By Paul Brinkmann, Orlando Sentinel on 05.05.16

Word Count **796**



In June, the movie "Finding Dory" will be in theaters. It is about Dory, a Pacific blue tang fish. Photo: Wikimedia

ORLANDO, Fla. - Animal welfare activists and pet shop owners fear a wave of interest in tropical fish and the possible decimation of key species after the June release of Disney Pixar's "Finding Dory."

The cartoon movie is a sequel to 2003's "Finding Nemo," which had prompted a surge of cute orange clownfish being caught in the wild and sold at pet stores. Many parents and children, inexperienced with saltwater aquariums, bought a little Nemo fish and watched it die.

The new movie includes the return of absent-minded Dory, a cartoon version of a Pacific blue tang voiced by Ellen DeGeneres. "I think we are facing the same problem, and it's even worse because the blue tang is really unsuitable for a home aquarium animal," said Teresa Telecky, director of wildlife at Humane Society International. "Blue tang live up to 50 years and get big, over a foot long, which would require a 180-gallon aquarium, the size of a couch."

Telecky said the Humane Society has asked to talk with Disney about the movie and its impact on the marine pet trade. Other groups such as the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals are urging families to buy plush-toy versions of Dory instead of the real thing.

Disney did not provide answers to specific questions about its plans, but a spokeswoman said in an email that Disney's conservation team is working with the Association of Zoos and Aquariums on a program to support tang conservation. The company also said it is preparing educational materials "discouraging personal ownership of blue tangs."

The Marine Aquarium Societies of North America reported that marine biologists have talked to Disney about the storyline, particularly suggestions that blue tang can be raised in captivity. Raising blue tang from eggs or larvae in captivity is not possible yet, because captive-breeding efforts have failed.

The baby fish die in captivity because they don't eat normal fish food that other tropical fish in tanks eat, said Matthew DiMaggio, assistant professor at the University of Florida and a leading researcher on blue tang. "We knew this movie was going to come out, and we have been trying to raise them. But they are a challenge," DiMaggio said.

After "Finding Nemo," SeaWorld helped launch a program called Rising Tide, which attempts to raise blue tang and other marine ornamental fish in captivity. The program just scored a success with raising the first yellow tang in Hawaii and has improved breeding for the clownfish. But so far, the blue tang has only been raised to 22 days old in Florida laboratories at Ruskin and Fort Pierce.

In Orlando, aquarium supply store owner Marcy Sweeney vowed she won't sell any blue tang, aka Pacific palette surgeonfish. "Thousands of clownfish died after 'Finding Nemo,'" said Sweeney, owner at Sea in the City. "People will tell you that you can set up an aquarium immediately and raise these fish, but they are generally wrong. It's not that easy."

She said she tries to educate customers about the needs of the animals. "People will try to tell parents that they can put a small young tang in a small tank, but that's like having a greyhound living in a small apartment, or worse," Sweeney said.

Mike Bober, CEO of the Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council, said sales reports showed only a moderate increase in clown fish sales after "Finding Nemo," contrary to many media reports and anecdotal accounts at the time. Bober said people interested in aquariums can research the right fish for them at MyRightFish.com.

Blue tang can be purchased online, and some online sales sites include a warning that large saltwater tanks are needed. One site advertised a small blue tang starting at \$50, plus \$30 for next-day air shipping from California.

Telecky said many Disney movies that feature animals result in an enormous impact on those species, including Dalmatian puppies after "101 Dalmatians" installments. "Their latest movie, 'Zootopia,' has a cute fox in it, a fennec fox, which is native to Africa," Telecky said. "Sales of fennecs have taken off around the globe now."

In recent years, Disney has generally avoided animal welfare controversy, and the company consulted with renowned primatologist Jane Goodall when it opened Animal Kingdom in Orlando.

Rene Umberger, executive director at Hawaii-based For the Fishes, said she and the Humane Society are organizing a publicity campaign. "Without a concerted effort, there is a very real chance that species of fish could be wiped out, meaning near extinction in the wild," Umberger said. "The other concern is, fishermen use cyanide to capture these fish, which can damage the reef. The fishermen already report that they must go farther and farther out from land to find the blue tang, and the movie hasn't even come out yet."

Quiz

- 1 Which sentence BEST summarizes how Hollywood movies affect the pet trade industry?
- (A) When new movies featuring animals are released, the Marine Aquarium Societies of North America work with movie creators to issue warnings for endangered animals.
 - (B) When new movies featuring animals are released, more animals die in captivity because they are not treated the same way they live in the wild.
 - (C) When new movies featuring animals are released, sales of specific species decrease even though their trade and capture increase.
 - (D) When new movies featuring animals are released, public interest increases, which leads to an increase in animal capture, trade and sales.
- 2 The author develops the main idea of the article in each of the following ways EXCEPT:
- (A) by comparing animal sales before and after the release of popular movies
 - (B) by providing anecdotes to prove that animal sales increased after the last "Finding Nemo" movie was released
 - (C) by describing how the release of popular movies affects sales of specific species of animals
 - (D) by identifying programs designed to help prevent animal mistreatment after movie releases
- 3 Read the sentence from the first paragraph of the article.

Animal welfare activists and pet shop owners fear a wave of interest in tropical fish and the possible decimation of key species after the June release of Disney Pixar's "Finding Dory."

What does the word "decimation" convey in the sentence?

- (A) a sense of tragedy that more fish will likely die as a result of the movie's release
- (B) a sense of relief that the movie's release will discourage people from owning tropical fish in their own homes
- (C) a sense of hope that researchers and biologists will do more to protect the fish after the movie's release
- (D) a sense of disbelief that more fish will be caught and killed as a result of the movie's release

- 4 What is the meaning of the phrase "concerted effort" as used in the following sentence from the last paragraph?

"Without a concerted effort, there is a very real chance that species of fish could be wiped out, meaning near extinction in the wild," Umberger said.

- (A) organized idea
- (B) honest conversation
- (C) immediate law
- (D) united attempt

Answer Key

1 Which sentence BEST summarizes how Hollywood movies affect the pet trade industry?

- (A) When new movies featuring animals are released, the Marine Aquarium Societies of North America work with movie creators to issue warnings for endangered animals.
- (B) When new movies featuring animals are released, more animals die in captivity because they are not treated the same way they live in the wild.
- (C) When new movies featuring animals are released, sales of specific species decrease even though their trade and capture increase.
- (D) When new movies featuring animals are released, public interest increases, which leads to an increase in animal capture, trade and sales.**

2 The author develops the main idea of the article in each of the following ways EXCEPT:

- (A) by comparing animal sales before and after the release of popular movies
- (B) by providing anecdotes to prove that animal sales increased after the last "Finding Nemo" movie was released**
- (C) by describing how the release of popular movies affects sales of specific species of animals
- (D) by identifying programs designed to help prevent animal mistreatment after movie releases

3 Read the sentence from the first paragraph of the article.

Animal welfare activists and pet shop owners fear a wave of interest in tropical fish and the possible decimation of key species after the June release of Disney Pixar's "Finding Dory."

What does the word "decimation" convey in the sentence?

- (A) a sense of tragedy that more fish will likely die as a result of the movie's release**
- (B) a sense of relief that the movie's release will discourage people from owning tropical fish in their own homes
- (C) a sense of hope that researchers and biologists will do more to protect the fish after the movie's release
- (D) a sense of disbelief that more fish will be caught and killed as a result of the movie's release

- 4 What is the meaning of the phrase "concerted effort" as used in the following sentence from the last paragraph?

"Without a concerted effort, there is a very real chance that species of fish could be wiped out, meaning near extinction in the wild," Umberger said.

- (A) organized idea
- (B) honest conversation
- (C) immediate law
- (D) united attempt**