

To whom it concerns:

I have spent years as a biologist exploring the inner lives of fishes. What I've uncovered indicates that we grossly underestimate these diverse and sentient aquatic vertebrates, including those we so often see on pet store shelves—the lovely Bettas.

Pet stores often display Betta fish alone and in plastic cups with barely enough water to turn around, much less swim in. This miserable existence contrasts starkly with life in their natural Asian habitat, where they navigate the waters of marshes, rice fields, ponds, and slow-moving streams that can stretch for miles. At a bare minimum, a single captive Betta should be provided with *gallons* of filtered, temperature-controlled water. And despite claims that they can only live by themselves, under the right circumstances they thrive in the company of other fishes.

When fishes are treated as inventory—merely objects to be stocked, stacked, priced, and unloaded—they suffer. Shoppers who wander into a pet store and impulsively buy a Betta may be under the impression that these intelligent animals require little care. As a result, many are simply set on a shelf in a bare bowl and condemned to a life of loneliness and neglect. Some pet store customers have reportedly met with indifference when alerting employees to the presence of dead or dying Bettas on store shelves.

I wholeheartedly support the efforts of petitioners Sheryl Petrillo and Liz Cabrera Holtz in asking that the Allentown PA City Council add guinea pigs and Bettas to the list of protected species included in their Humane Pet Store ordinance. It's clear that these sentient creatures deserve far better than to be viewed as merchandise or decorations.

Sincerely,

Jonathan Balcombe, Ph.D.

Author: *What a Fish Knows* (New York Times bestseller, translated into 17 languages)