

Marine hitchhikers: a preliminary study on invertebrates unintentionally transported via the international pet trade

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Abstract	<p>The pet trade in aquatic organisms is a significant source of non-indigenous species introductions. In comparison with ornamental animals, unintentionally transported invertebrate assemblages are easily overlooked by traders and keepers. Moreover, hitchhiking species detection and identification is difficult even for experts. The densities of "hitchhikers" in aquaria may be relatively higher than those in the wild. These phenomena are known in freshwater aquaria but poorly studied in marine ones. We found 17 species of non-ornamental marine invertebrates in one of the leading importers of aquarium species in the Czech Republic in November 2017. The set comprised six gastropods, two bivalves, three cnidarians, two echinoderms, two crustaceans, and two polychaete worms. In one case, a symbiont was also detected, associated with the host "hitchhiker". No "live rocks" are traded by the surveyed wholesaler. Thus, the found animals were not imported together with this item as larvae or eggs. Contrary to the transport of targeted ornamental species, it is clear that transport of "hitchhikers" is occurring despite standard legislative regulations and should be brought to the attention of conservationists, wildlife managers, policymakers and other stakeholders.</p>
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