



## “Currents” September 2024

### **Don't Let Your Pets Become Pests**

Aquarium fish can be a wonderful addition to a household, but they should never be dumped or released into waterways. They are likely not native to Texas and can have devastating impacts on our pristine waterways and hill country environment. Often with good intentions, humans have been transporting plants and animals from one region to another for thousands of years. Once these non-native species get to a new area they will spread and thrive thanks to the abundant food, favorable habitat, and lack of natural predators. When this happens, the plant or animal can wreak havoc on the ecology of its new environment.

Texas is home to several invasive plants and animals including giant cane, feral hogs, zebra mussels, suckermouth catfish, nutria, and fire ants. Each of these species cause changes to the natural environment by consuming food needed by native species, damaging habitat, spreading disease, and quickly colonizing new areas. Among these, the suckermouth catfish is a common example of an animal that was originally kept as an aquarium pet, but careless release by humans have resulted in permanent populations in the wild.

The suckermouth catfish (also called plecostomus or armored catfish) is popular because of its ability to clean algae from your fish tank. However, its voracious appetite is far less charming when released into a waterway where it can drastically reduce the amount of green plants, therefore knocking out the base of the food chain and affecting all other aquatic organisms. They are also known to burrow into riverbanks leading to erosion and bank disturbance. The San Marcos River (joins the Guadalupe River near Gonzales) is currently home to a growing population of suckermouth catfish and substantial efforts are underway to reduce the numbers. In 2022, researchers from Texas A&M and Texas State Universities removed over 400 suckermouth catfish in one dewatering event at a San Marcos park. This exotic fish could pose a threat to the ecology of the upper Guadalupe River if a population becomes established. Currently, there are no confirmed occurrences of suckermouth catfish in Kerr County, but exotic fish like koi and goldfish have been observed in our waterways.

Though it is illegal, each year unwanted exotic plants and animals are dumped and released into the environment where they can quickly become an invasive species. Possibly the owner couldn't take the animal with them when they moved, it grew larger than they anticipated, or the animal is unhealthy. Whatever the reason, releasing any animal into local waterways can cause great harm to the environment, present a danger to people if the animal is aggressive, and it is illegal. UGRA encourages all pet owners to give serious consideration to care requirements and the long-term commitment of owning a pet before purchasing or adopting. However, if you are in a situation where you can no longer care for an animal, do not release it. Ask a local pet store to accept it, find someone to adopt it, or seek advice from an animal rescue organization. If these options are not available, please contact Kerr County Animal Services for assistance (830-257-3100) and visit [texasinvasives.org/neverdumpyourtank](https://texasinvasives.org/neverdumpyourtank) for information from Texas Parks & Wildlife Department.

### **Let's Keep Our River Clean**

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