

Greeting fellow Koi Keepers.

It was most distressing to see in Roy's newsletter about the outbreak of KHV in East London.

I would like to share some thoughts on the subject.

I think the recent outbreak of KHV is the only one ever seen in East London. We have to face realities that KHV has spread worldwide. It is a virus which cannot be killed. It is very contagious and has deadly consequences for the collection where it breaks out. It is not going to go away.

I am familiar with the outbreak you have had. Although I do not have all the exact details I must point out that koi keepers do have other problems from time to time. Parasite outbreaks and bacterial infections happen in our hobby just as they do in other hobbies involving animals. We have the occasional KHV outbreak and the sad thing is there is nothing we can do once it occurs whereas the other diseases in koi can be controlled and cured.

There is a huge debate whether surviving koi should be kept or the whole collection euthanized. Current thinking is to destroy all survivors. If you do decide to keep the survivors they will probably become carriers and therefore any koi leaving this pond must only be dead ones that are going to be buried. No koi must be traded or given away. You will be giving away koi or trading koi knowing they were exposed to KHV and this leaves you liable for damages.

Calling for a ban on koi from any particular country is not a solution. As I mentioned KHV is wide spread throughout the world and even some local koi breeders have had KHV. A number of years ago there was a call from government to ban koi – that would mean all koi, all trading, all movement of koi (and carp). The only koi could be moved would be via a permit system and permits would be extremely hard to get.

Carp are alien species to South Africa rivers and government would like them controlled or removed. Impossible yes, but that is the thinking.

I do believe that instead of throwing our hands up in the air and giving up let's pool our knowledge and let's assist one another. We need to arm koi keepers with knowledge. We need to keep an open mind and learn all we can. Then we need some basic hygiene to be integrated into our koi keeping lives.

There is a lot that we can do to overcome this problem. We must be positive. We must realise people who have had KHV have dealt with it by sterilising everything and starting again – successfully.

All viruses are very easily spread. And all viruses need a host to survive. The KHV virus needs a cell inside the body which it invades. It then uses the material inside that cell to make copies of its self. Thousands and thousands of copies. Cells explode and the virus spreads to other cells.

As a koi keeper you must be in the front line of the battle by employing basic hygiene or biosecurity measures. Make sure you have your own nets and bowls and these are only used on your ponds. Do not allow anyone else to bring a bowl and or net onto your property from another pond. NEVER.

Do not allow a pond maintenance service to use their own nets, bowls or vacuum equipment. NEVER. This must be your own equipment that must be used in your pond. Think about it – one pond maintenance business can visit 5 – 8 ponds in a day. One after the other.

If you are going to help a friend – insist he gets his own bowls and nets.

Alternatively insist that anyone using a net or bowl in your pond sterilizes it first in front of you. Chlorine or Virkon S are very good at sterilising equipment and are used at the Koi Society Koi Shows.

If possible, have a quarantine tank or pond on your property. Any new koi must go into this quarantine pond for a minimum of 6 weeks. During this time you can observe the new koi and if there is a problem (bacterial, parasitical or viral) you can deal with it before it gets to your main collection and pond.

KHV and other diseases are triggered by stress. Stress is a major factor in disease outbreaks.

With KHV it appears to be triggered by stress (handling etc) and temperature and if it is going to break out this usually occurs above about 17 – 18 C.

KHV is mutating and the symptoms are not the same as they were a few years ago. We are seeing fewer deaths and the deaths taking longer to occur.

Introducing new koi into a collection carries with it a certain risk. A risk of cross infection from bacteria of different strains and carries with it the possibility of a parasite infection. This has been known in the fish industry since the beginning of time. It is also known in the hobby.

Hobbyists must learn some of the basics and they must be advised by people in the industry as well as people within the Koi Society.

With regards the possibility of KHV and other infections the biggest problem we have in South Africa is the lack of correct quarantining procedures when the fish first arrive through a dealer. Dealers (both local and imports) should quarantine new stock for 6 weeks or more.

These guys are the hobbyists front line of defence. Importing koi and selling them within days of arrival is highly irresponsible. Very often this is why we get disease outbreaks in our ponds soon after introducing new koi. The normal risk of bacterial infection which is always there is aggravated. By quarantining koi for 6 or more weeks problems that may occur within that batch of koi can be isolated and dealt with. Don't forget KHV usually breaks out quickly and deaths begin to occur within days.

Another very important reason for quarantine is to give the koi time to rest and recover from the transport stress. This stress occurs when moving koi any distance. And is more of a problem when koi are imported from other countries and they spend many hours in cramped conditions for long hours. Stress can cause internal problems that koi need time to recover from.

We do not want KHV in our hobby. It is a massive problem but we must temper this with some balance. There are more outbreaks of bacterial and parasitical infections than KHV outbreaks.

But we must exchange information and use common sense to help others overcome disease in our hobby.

Develop a relationship with your dealer. Seek out guys who do honestly quarantine for a reasonable length of time and follow a good protocol of testing and if necessary treatments. There are many good dealers around.

But always let the buyer beware.

Kind regards,

Chris

P.S. I think we must have a Koi Indaba again in East London so we can have a good open meeting and chat.