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Glowing fish to be first genetically changed pet

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WASHINGTON (Reuters) -- A little tropical fish that glows fluorescent red will be the first genetically engineered pet, a Texas-based company said Friday.

The zebra fish were originally developed to detect environmental toxins, but Alan Blake and colleagues at Yorktown Technologies, L.P. licensed them to sell as pets.

"These fish were bred to help fight environmental pollution," Blake said in a telephone interview. "They were bred to fluoresce in the presence of toxins."

Scientists have for decades used a gene called green fluorescent protein, taken from jellyfish, to help in research. The fish, sold under the trademarked name GloFish, carry a similar gene taken from a sea coral that makes it glow all the time.

Blake said there is no evidence the fish will pose any threat to the environment. Normal zebra fish are commonly used in aquariums and cannot survive in non-tropical waters.

"They are very bright under any type of light," Blake said. "Under ultraviolet light in a dark room they will appear to be glowing in the dark."

Blake, who before he set up the new business ran an Internet company, says he did not have a particular interest in fish before. "I had an aquarium when I was about 10," he said.

The fish, developed at the National University of Singapore by researcher Zhiyuan Gong, are also available as pets in Taiwan, the company said. They will sell for about \$5 apiece at pet stores in January.



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