

GEORGIA AQUARIUM ANIMAL FACT SHEET

Red Piranha

Pygocentrus nattereri

Range/Habitat

- The red piranha is found widely in South America in basins of the Amazon, Parana-Paraguay, and Essequibo Rivers. It also is found in coastal rivers of northeastern Brazil.
- This fish typically occurs in creeks and interconnected ponds, and it prefers areas with dense vegetation.

Physical Characteristics

- Male and female red piranhas are alike externally. The average length of an adult is 6 to 8 inches (15 – 20 cm), although they can grow to 13 inches (33.3 cm) and 8.5 lbs. (3.85 kg).
- Their stocky bodies have reddish bellies (the fish are sometimes called the “red-bellied piranha”), though overall coloration varies depending on age and location.
- Other coloration includes sides that are often pale brown to slightly olive, and backs that are bluish gray to brownish.
- Their powerful jaws house triangular, interlocking, sharp teeth.

Diet/Feeding

- The red piranha feed communally, with groups of 20 to 30 individuals waiting in vegetation to ambush their prey. The prey is attacked en masse. The aggressiveness of the attack is accelerated by the presence of blood in the water.
- These highly predaceous carnivores also scavenge for food and consume insects, snails, worms, plants, and even nip the fins of other fishes.
- The species can feed continuously and maintains its powerful bite by replacing teeth on alternate sides of the jaw.
- The red piranha is preyed upon by crocodilians, fish-eating birds, large mammals (including jaguars), as well as by large pimelodid catfishes.

Conservation Status

- The red piranha is not included on the IUCN Red List.

Additional Information

- The piranha exhibits a “lurking, then dashing” sequence of behaviors during the day.
- Feeding times vary by age and size: adults forage mainly at dusk and dawn; medium-sized individuals are most active at dawn, late afternoon and night; while smaller fishes feed during the day.
- A hierarchical structure often exists in small schools.
- Although this is an aquarium fish, some states in the U.S. do not permit red piranha sales, fearing hobbyists may release them into the wild where they could multiply and feed upon indigenous fishes.
- Although it is not as aggressive as once believed, red piranha can inflict serious bites. However, they are unlikely to attack humans unless blood is present in the water.

- People living near rivers commonly catch and eat red piranha. Large numbers also are caught to use as bait for large catfishes.
- After an elaborate courtship display involving swimming in circles, females deposit layers of eggs on plants in the water and then the male fertilizes them. The male guards and fans the egg masses until they hatch in nine to ten days. The success of annual reproduction varies depending on the degree to which the flood plain (savanna) is flooded.

Source

www.fishbase.net

Grzimek's Animal Life Encyclopedia, Second Edition, Volume 4: Fishes 1; pg. 346