



The little fish who eats people

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same job and, if you hold the dish under water, he will also shave the hair off your arm.

The white piranha is often called caribe *mondonguero*, which means "dealer in tripe" and by some stretch of the imagination the allusion is to this piranha's abundance around village slaughterhouses where offal is regularly tossed in the stream. It's an unforgettable sight. You'll give up swimming forever. The caribe *capaburro* or "donkey castrater" is, oddly enough, known by that name over a wide range (from Venezuela to southern Brazil) in several languages, so it may well deserve its reputation. Capaburro often weigh four or five pounds and one glance at this snubnosed piranha is enough to intimidate any jackass.

The dentation of a piranha is more wicked than a casual examination reveals. Although its canine teeth look like unicuspid with a single sharp edge, if you depress the gums and expose a complete tooth, you find a tricuspid—three cutting edges which come into play when the fish clamps its powerful jaws shut. The piranha doesn't bite and chew in the manner of a shark but literally shears out chunks of flesh like an animated scalpel. People who have been bitten by piranha often say that they weren't even aware of it until they saw blood in the water. The sensation of pain is delayed as it is with a razor cut. A poultice of tobacco is the usual Indian remedy for minor wounds, which leave deep semi-circular scars.

Nobody has ever presented a definitive explanation as to when and under what circumstances piranha become man-eaters. There is ample evidence that they are dangerous in deep, swift, or turbid water, which bears out the natives' belief that they are most aggressive during the rainy season, and on any occasion when there is blood in the water. The latter is a common situation in the simple act of releasing or cleaning fish. However, it is possible to wade in piranha-filled rivers where the water is clear and slow flowing in the dry

season, I have never
seen an Indian