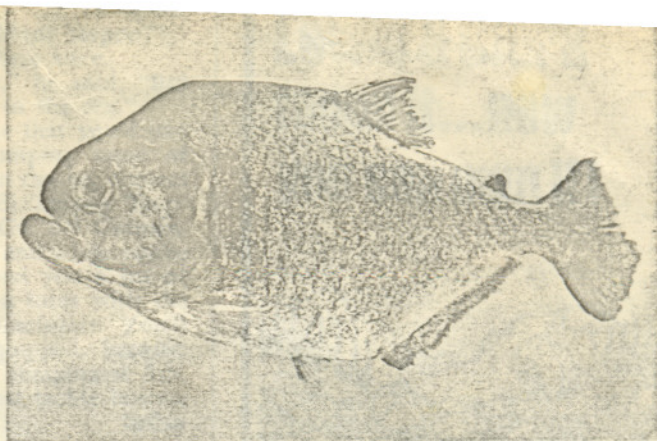
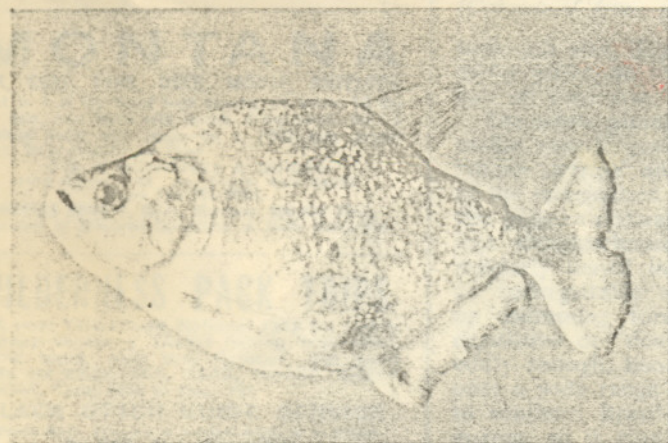




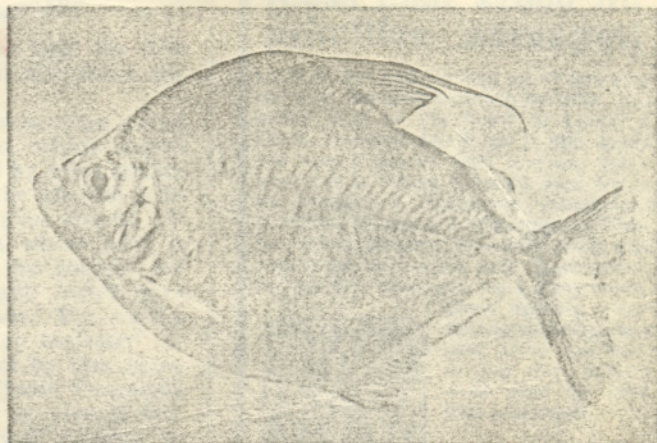
Donkey Castrater Piranha



Black Piranha



White Piranha



Wimple's Piranha

Who Eats People

piranha. So the ban in Florida recognized a very real danger. Dumping piranha in the village pond is not the act of a rational citizen—as this *characin* is not a very rational fish.

The popular conception of piranha is that they are small, aggressive, occur in vast, water-churning schools, and that they eat man and beast alike. The facts are that at least two species reach a weight of 8 pounds, some are so shy that they seldom take a natural bait (much less an artificial), and a few species are almost solitary in habit. All are potentially dangerous to man, particularly the capaburro, dusky, and black piranhas, as many fingerless and toeless men can testify. Yet, throughout tropical South America primitive people bathe, swim, and freely wade in piranha-infested waters. The trick is knowing where and when—a

knowledge which brings forth a flood of speculation but little else. During the past twenty years I have waded among piranha for hundreds of hours while fishing and pulling seine nets in tributaries of the Orinoco, Amazon, and Paraguay Rivers. I am a devout coward, however, and the only thing that gives me confidence is when an unscarred, all-extremities-accounted-for, local Indian (preferably over eighty years old) says "Ho-Kay" and jumps in first. Even then, I wait to see if he comes up with a smile on his face.

Piranha (pronounced peer-ahn-yah) is the name given by the Tupi speakers of Brazil and literally means "tooth-fish." Throughout most of Spanish-speaking South America it's known as *caribe*, the origin of that tribal name being the Carib Indians who were cannibals. Other Indian

appellations such as *pana*, *perai*, and *piraya* are used in the Guianas and eastern Peru, but piranhas were first imported by tropical fish-dealers from Brazil so the Tupi name stuck.

Scientific literature is not clear on how many different piranhas exist. An educated guess would indicate about forty species in five different genera. The common names of piranha are practical descriptions translated from Indian dialects into Spanish or Portuguese. For instance, the caribe *pinche* or "kitchen boy" caribe is perhaps more friendly than most, in that several species of piranhas serve as automatic dish-washers for the Indians. The old lady simply leaves her plates in the river and the fish clean the food residue off, slick as a whistle. Actually, another characin called the "bucktoothed tetra" does the (Continued on page 241)