

do this where the capaburro, dusky, or black piranhas abound but in areas where the ruddy, white, or Wimple's occur, they enter the water with no hesitation. Wimple's piranha is an exception in having comparatively weak jaws—which may be why it's ignored. This is purely a personal observation, and certainly not a valid rule, but it would appear that knowing which species is present plays some role in deciding where and when. On numerous occasions we have been wading in a particular location and later, just a few miles away, been told to stay out of the river.

PIRANHA species distribution is probably not only a matter of habitat preference as to bottom type, depth, and current velocity, but also a seasonal condition. After extensive periods of collecting specimens in one Orinoco tributary, we found that our nets had taken only adult fish of a particular species and never any juveniles. This would seem to indicate a migration from the main river. It's possible that when streams flood in the rainy season the larger, more dangerous species occur in areas that the Indians otherwise consider "safe." Language is, of course, a barrier, but even on trips when we had an accurate interpreter along, with biological training, the explanations were predicated on the *acceptance* of what happened rather than any understanding of it. The sun comes up, the moon goes down, and you don't ford the Rio São Laurencio at Brown's Farm, although it's perfectly all right to wade at the village two miles upstream. Provided the water is clear. And you are lucky.

The well-publicized film demonstration of a piranha school stripping a cow to a skeleton in a matter of minutes is factual, but it is provoked in the same manner that one can create a shark "attack" by towing a tuna carcass behind a boat. I watched a French TV crew try to set this up in Venezuela. The piranha took no interest in the deceased for two hours, despite bloodying the water. When everybody started to pack up and go home, the bashful cannibals suddenly went berserk and ate the cow so fast that the cameraman barely had time to get in focus. This was a school of Natterer's piranha, which are about as unpredictable as any I've observed. I doubt if the "dealer in tripe" or white piranha would hesitate but then, fish that hang around slaughterhouses have conditioned appetites.

The fact is that cattle wade South American rivers with impunity. On rare occasions an animal with running sores on its legs will get nipped. However, in common with the shark, piranha evidently respond to panic situations. It is virtually impossible to catch an undamaged fish on rod-and-reel in piranha-infested waters. From the instant a fish is hooked the piranha go to work chopping off its