

Pet Piranhas – Like having your own baby Jaws.

When I was a young boy my brothers and I went through about a ten year stretch where we adopted a number of Piranhas for pets. Piranhas are predators whose natural habitat lies in various locations of South America, probably most well-known for coming out of the Amazon. No, not the merchant website Amazon. The hot, steamy deleterious jungles Amazon.

Like their habitat, Piranhas are also quite dangerous, especially when travelling in numbers where they can do major damage and often kill their prey. But they're pretty good at it going solo as my brothers and I witnessed many times. For us, watching our mini Jaws with his vicious, stalking looking under bite had become a joyous pastime. Sometimes we'd invite a bunch of friends over, turn out all the lights, and gather around the fish tank in anticipation of an attack on a helpless victim, usually a goldfish. Although we did offer our little buddy a few crayfish and an eel, which he promptly bit in half.

Over the years we typically went with red-belly Piranhas, which gets its nickname from a light reddish color on its underbelly. Usually it was one at a time in his own tank, but we did try having two cohabite, and it worked out fine. We just had to make sure they were both fed frequently so they wouldn't turn on each other. The red bellies never grew to a very large size. I'd say about four inches from head to tail and 2 to 3 inches belly to back. However, we did once go with a black-belly Piranha.

The black-belly Piranha doesn't have the red underbelly of course, but it isn't really black either. The whole fish is just a darker shade of grey, but they can also grow larger and in our experience, are quicker and deadlier than their red-belly cousins. All Piranhas will grow according to their environments. A larger fish tank yields a larger fish. So one can imagine how big these things get in the Amazon. If you've ever seen the movie Piranha (I believe it was in 3-D) that's probably about right.

Our black belly was about double the size of the red bellies we had, and he lived significantly longer as well, almost five years. Some people enjoy exotic fish, and we had those too (I hate to admit it but we once fed a kissing fish to our blacky) but for those who enjoy a little more action, a Piranha is the way to go.

Some drawbacks on owning a Piranha: You've got to keep them fed and it's a bit more costly to keep a supply of goldfish in contrast to buying fish food. And, depending on your particular Piranha's personality, you might be sitting and waiting for some action for a while. They don't always attack right away, and if they're really shy you might wake up the next day and only then notice that the goldfish has disappeared.