

Collecting Fish From the Amazon

How do you collect your own aquarium fish from the Amazon or Malawi?

By Mike Wickham

Q. I am a college student looking to travel abroad and collect cichlid fish from the Amazon or Malawi. I can't find any information on how to do this. I can find dozens of articles on collecting the fish, but how do they get there?

A. I think it would be great fun to collect my own cichlid fish in the Amazon. Many hobbyists have done it, and I hope to do so someday. I've had several hobbyist friends who have made trips for collecting. Some do it for scientific studies, while others go as hobbyists or ecotourists.

I don't usually recommend companies or Internet sites in my column, but I'm going to make an exception here. One outfit I've heard great things about is Project Piaba. It is "a community-based interdisciplinary project established to understand the ecological and socio-cultural systems of the middle Rio Negro basin, Amazonas, Brazil, in order to conserve and maintain the live ornamental fishery and other renewable resources at commercially feasible, and ecologically sustainable levels." These people study ways to preserve the environment and the hobby. One of their goals is to find ways for the locals to make a living off the rainforest without destroying it or the resident species. I also like that they've done some great work studying the cardinal tetra, which is my favorite freshwater fish.

That gives you a destination, but you still need a way to get there. Several ecotourism companies offer trips to the Amazon. Some are listed on the Project Piaba site. Several of my friends have visited Project Piaba using Margarita Tours. Happy fishkeeping!