

New veggie piranha-like species named after Tolkien villain

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Myloplus sauron, INPA 40824, holotype, male, 132.8 mm SL, Brazil, Pará, Anapu municipality, rio Xingu, downstream from the Tamaracá waterfall. Credit: *Neotropical Ichthyology* (2024). DOI: 10.1590/1982-0224-2023-0095

A new vegetarian piranha-like species discovered by scientists in the Brazilian Amazon has been named Sauron after the Lord of the Rings villain, Britain's Natural History Museum [said](#) on Tuesday.

Scientists formally described and named the "Myloplus sauron" because its round body and distinctive orange and black markings closely resemble the infamous evil eye of author JRR Tolkien's fictional character.

The [new species](#), one of two recently named by scientists as part of an effort to better understand fish biodiversity in the Amazon River, has human-like teeth to suit its plant-based diet.

Although closely related to piranhas, it is better known as a "pacu"—the common name usually used for the piranha's vegetarian relatives.

The study, [published](#) in the journal *Neotropical Ichthyology* on Monday, sought to shed light on Amazonian piranhas and their relatives, which are renowned for being difficult to tell apart as they change appearance throughout their lifetime.

Rupert Collins, lead author and senior curator in charge of fish at the London museum, helped to describe the species.

"As soon as my colleagues suggested the name for this fish, we knew it was perfect for it," he said.

"It looks just like the Eye of Sauron, especially with the red fins and orange patches on its body."

Myloplus sauron are found only in the Xingu River Basin, a Brazilian tributary of the Amazon containing more than 600 [fish species](#), including over 70 found nowhere else in the world.

As many as 42 percent of the fish found in the Amazon River are thought to remain unknown to science.

More information: Valéria N. Machado et al, Integrative taxonomy of the black-barred disk pacus (Characiformes: Serrasalminidae), including the redescription of *Myloplus schomburgkii* and the description of two new species, *Neotropical Ichthyology* (2024). [DOI: 10.1590/1982-0224-2023-0095](https://doi.org/10.1590/1982-0224-2023-0095)

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