

red tail catfish (*Phractocephalus hemioliopterus*)

The red tail catfish (*Phractocephalus hemioliopterus*) is a large, striking freshwater fish native to South America, particularly found in the Amazon, Orinoco, and Essequibo river basins. Here are some key characteristics:

1. *Appearance*:

- It has a broad, flat head and a long, muscular body.
- The most distinctive feature is its bright red or orange tail fin, which contrasts with its dark gray or black body.
- The sides of the fish often have white or yellowish undersides.
- It has long barbels (whisker-like sensory organs) near its mouth.

2. *Size*:

- Red tail catfish can grow very large, often reaching lengths of 3 to 4 feet (90–120 cm) in the wild.
- They can weigh up to 80 pounds (36 kg) or more.

3. *Behavior*:

- They are predatory and opportunistic feeders, consuming fish, crustaceans, and other small aquatic animals.
- They are generally solitary and nocturnal, becoming more active at night.

4. *Habitat*:

- They prefer slow-moving or stagnant waters, such as rivers, lakes, and flooded forests.
- They thrive in warm, tropical climates.

5. *Aquarium Care*:

- Due to their large size, they require very spacious tanks (hundreds of gallons) if kept in captivity.
- They are not recommended for beginner aquarists because of their size, dietary needs, and potential aggression.
- They can live for 15 years or more with proper care.

6. *Conservation*:

- While not currently considered endangered, they face threats from habitat destruction and overfishing in some regions.

This species is popular among advanced aquarium enthusiasts but requires significant space and resources to thrive.