





words + photos by Jeff Currier





More than 350 miles west of Manaus, Brazil our float plane descended towards one of Amazon's most far-flung fisheries. A fishery where access has been limited by the Brazilian government to very few anglers. A river the locals call "Rio de Gigantes" because its home to the largest peacock bass known to man. This is the Marié River, and I'm with Amazon fly fishing guru and friend, Rodrigo Salles of Untamed Angling.

The Marié River is as remote in the Amazon as you can be. Its headwaters begin in the northwest corner of Brazil near the Colombian border. The meandering river flows for 450 miles before entering the high reaches of the Rio Negro, the second largest tributary to the Amazon.

For Rodrigo and his Untamed Angling partner Marcelo Perez, running an adventurous fly fishing program in the middle of nowhere requires extensive research and there's only one way to make such endeavors work - create a program where the local's benefit. This means negotiating an agreement with Indian Chiefs. What Rodrigo and Marcelo have done is reward the locals more so for protecting their land by allowing high paying tourist fly fishers to visit rather than by allowing

the outside world to rape and pillage their lands like in so many other places around the world.

The Marié glistened below as it twisted through the untouched rainforest. Beautiful white sand beaches lined inside turns while river bends looked ridden with sunken trees and logs. I quivered with anticipation. This is ideal habitat for peacock bass. Soon we were skidding on top of the water up to our waiting mothership, the Untamed Amazon.

The Untamed Amazon is a brand new boat specially designed for the Marié. This is the first vessel with 100% solar power generation for all electricity use. The boat has water filtration and its own sewage treatment plant. Untamed has gone out of its way with this boat considering the environment and the surrounding Indian Territory Communities.

Once settled in our rooms we geared up to fish for the next six days. On the Marié our target fish is the speckled peacock bass (*Cichla temensis*). There are many types of peacock bass in the Amazon but the *temensis* is the largest species. In most of the Amazon these fish rarely exceed 15lbs, but on the Marié it's not uncommon to catch ones of 20lbs or larger. This makes



this place perhaps the greatest peacock bass fishery in the entire Amazon.

Eight, nine, or ten-weight rods work for peacock bass fishing. For the Marié however, forget the 8-weight because of the huge Marié fish. I brought my 9-weight Jungle Winston. And while floating lines are optimal, bring a sink tip as well. Scientific Anglers makes the Titan Jungle tapers in both floating and with intermediate tips. In my opinion these lines are mandatory. They are tapered to cast big flies like a dream and have a 60lb core strength. The reason you need the 60lb core is because rather than fish 20lb tippets like in the past, we fish straight 50lb fluorocarbon leader. It's critical that the fly line is stronger than the leader so the tippet will break and not the fly line.

Rodrigo and I, along with our local boatman Hamilton, hit the water promptly the next morning. The best places to find the huge temensis are in the oxbows. Oxbows are sort of like lakes off the main river channel. This is where fallen trees drape the edges. Peacocks hold deep inside the structure and this is where the 50lb leader proves its importance. Big peacock bass pull as hard as any fish in the world. They can yank a person



right out of the boat if not careful. But good news, if you stay strong during the tug-a-war for about 15 seconds, most of the time you win.

Throughout the week I tossed my favorite peacock fly. It's not a particular pattern but it has plenty of red and white colors peacocks love. It's a size 3/0. This one also has light dumbbell eyes to add sink. I fish it on the floating Jungle line and when the fly lands I start with two hard strips then let it sink five seconds. Then I pull it along with an easy strip.

The action on a distant Amazon tributary is unreal. There are tons of fish if you're away from humans. Here on the Marié drainage there's no one. Not a soul. All week Rodrigo and I landed numerous butterfly peacock bass (*Cichla ocellaris*). They aren't our target but are super fun to catch when the big fish aren't easy to find.

I advise fly fishing travelers to set goals for every trip. This week there are two things I hope to accomplish. The first is easy – have a great time. The second is catch a peacock bass over 20lbs. This is my 6th peacock bass trip and my biggest was slightly over 14lbs so this goal seemed almost unfathomable. But Rodrigo assured me I had a good chance.

As Rodrigo and I picked our way through the butterfly peacocks the first morning I could feel we were in the presence of huge peacocks. Sure enough I connected to a beast early in and the duel was on. I won the hardest part, the beginning of the battle, but in the end as Hamilton poised with the net, my colorful fish made a gill-rattling leap and my fly dislodged.

I was disappointed but reminded myself it was early in the day. I took a glance at my leader and fly to be sure all was ok and

went back into action. It wasn't ten casts later I was on again. And this was the fish I came for.

I kid you not, after a few minutes of furry I was holding a 21 pounder. I couldn't believe it. There's nothing better than obtaining your hardest goal on the first day. The pressure was off before it started. The oversized cichlid measured at 85cm long and 55cm in the girth!

In past Amazon trips I average two peacock bass over 10lbs in a week. Thirty minutes after the 21lber, to my disbelief, I landed another. This one was 16lbs. He chased both Rodrigo's and my fly to the boat and ate mine as my leader entered the rod. It was a miracle I hooked him. And a marvel I didn't break my rod when the fish exploded and spun away inches from my tip.

Normally I'd keep casting but it was time to appreciate the moment. I popped a beer and kicked back. Rodrigo kept hard at work. I enjoy watching a good angler cast and hit the spots. Rodrigo is amazing. And he knew there was a big fish feeding frenzy. Rodrigo had himself braced in the position to hang on tight and torque on a giant. Sure enough as I drained my last swig of beer Rodrigo hooked up.

Rodrigo landed a gorgeous paca. The peacock bass types can get confusing so I'll try to explain. Once again, the big peacock bass we're after are *Cichla temensis*. The common name is speckled peacock bass. When they have the dark bars on the side they call them Azul. When the bars don't exist or are hard to see but instead there are beautiful white speckles all over, they are called paca.

***IN THE AFTERNOON I ADDED A 17LBER
AND 18LBER TO MY DAY, AND
RODRIGO ADDED A 16LBER TO HIS.
UN-FREAKING-BELIEVABLE!***

Rodrigo's paca weighed 14lbs. Already this was the best day of peacock bass fishing I'd ever experienced.

I could go on and on writing about our clashes with each big fish throughout this incredible week. But it was our last day that I'll remember the most vividly. The Untamed Amazon had been moving its way downriver all week. The idea behind the mothership moving is so we never fish the same water twice.





Rodrigo, Hamilton and I zipped as far down river as Untamed Angling goes on the Marié. We headed for an oxbow off the main river. Rodrigo liked this spot because it had everything from deep banks with sunken trees for blind casting to a flat. A flat?

Yes a flat. Rodrigo said at midday if we had enough sun we'd be sight casting to cruising peacocks across a shallow sand flat.

It all sounded incredible to me. I was in a slump and hadn't landed a big peacock on two days. I was ready. We started at the lake mouth and eased our way in. I could tell by the intensity in which Rodrigo was fishing that I better beware for the possibility for that fish I've been dreaming of.

Rodrigo struck first and it wasn't ten minutes into our morning. He was dredging with a sinking line. Most peacock fishing is done with the floater or intermediate sinking lines but Rodrigo wanted to give super deep a try. He had my attention as he got tugged around by his colorful contestant.

Moments later Hamilton netted a lunker peacock. The peacock weighed 15lbs. I broke out the camera and blazed a few shots.

We were in a typical big fish spot. Rodrigo and I cast towards the banks and sunken logs relentlessly but nothing more than a few of the smaller butterfly peacock species. These fish are fun and keep the energy going but every time you get hit you're hoping for the big one.

At 11am, after we'd been pounding away for three hours, I grabbed a brew and Rodrigo took a break as well. I thought we were getting ready to move but Rodrigo looked up at the sun then towards the middle of the lagoon.

"See the shallow bar out there Jeff?" asked Rodrigo. "After these beers we'll ease over and wait for fish to cross it. You are going to go nuts if it's on..."

Visibility was superb. We could see across the four-foot-deep flat for a hundred feet. Sure enough, there was a hard to see peacock crossing and Rodrigo busted out a long accurate cast. I watched hoping to see the brute dart for his fly. Instead the fish sort of spooked and wheeled away in the other direction.

I don't know why I make things harder on myself, but because Rodrigo had a fish in his area I looked toward the opposite side. The problem is I had the sun in my eyes and some bad cloud reflection. I could hardly see. But hardly doesn't mean I couldn't see at all. And I thought I saw an ugly brute of a peacock bass.

I made a cast. Nothing. I was hesitant to cast again but then I got another glimpse. It was a fish and this time I plunked my fly close. There was no doubt I had this fish. I braced myself and after two quick strips to straighten my leader and line I began a slow deliberate retrieve. I didn't go long before a hellacious thump.

By the swoosh on hook-up we knew this was no ordinary peacock. And by the sound of line crackling off my spool despite my drag tightened heavily on my Bauer Reel we knew. This fish was more powerful than any big fish all week. I couldn't stop this one. Luckily, I was safe from snags because the colossal peacock ran straight across the lagoon.

"You have a true monster Jeff! A MONSTER!" Rodrigo shouted as he reeled his rig in. Then he worked his way to me and slapped me on the back. "A true monster I see!"

Indeed this peacock was an XXXL. And this fight wouldn't be the ordinary one or two minute big fish battle. This fish came half way to the boat then surged back out at least six times. Finally I got him close and we got a look. No doubt, this fish was bigger than my day one 21 pounder.

There were a few more startling moments in battle. It's never easy getting a mammoth of any fish species in a net. But soon we succeeded and we hovered over Hamilton's shoulder. "To the beach immediately Hamilton," requested Rodrigo.

I couldn't stop staring at this one. Not only was he ginormous but the colors and condition of this special peacock were beyond belief. There wasn't a miscue on him. This peacock weighed 24.5lbs and measured 92cm. It was the longest fish ever measured here on the Marié but short a couple pounds of the river record.

We shot a ton of photos. I hardly noticed Rodrigo clicking them off because I was mesmerized. Advice to everyone – when you catch a magnificent fish enjoy it. Study every inch of the beautiful creature then look deep into its eyes. And when you release them, don't take your sights off them until they completely disappear back to the wild. This is the ultimate way never to forget the moment. It's why we catch & release fish.

I need not say much more about my trip to the Marié River in Brazil. The peacock bass fishing there blew my mind. Fishing with Rodrigo was a blast. And the services of Untamed Angling from start to finish were second to none. I haven't even mentioned that the chef on the Untamed Amazon has delivered some of the finest meals I've ever enjoyed on a fishing trip. Hands down, I believe I've experienced the best peacock bass fishing I'll ever see in my life!

To book the Marié River one can go directly to Untamed Angling or contact Yellow Dog Flyfishing Adventures based out of Bozeman, Montana. Or contact our author Jeff Currier at jeffcurrier.com. It should be known that the Marié season is short due to weather and water conditions and although the fishing is still in its exploration days, it seems late-August until mid-November are the most productive times.

Or visit yellowdogflyfishing.com



ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

With over forty years of experience fly fishing the world, Jeff Currier has quite possibly fished more countries and caught more species on a fly rod than any person alive. He's an active lecturer, published author, a well-known artist, and the subject of numerous films, articles and media projects. He is a well sought after expert for television and commentary on radio appearing on Fishing the West, Fly Fishing the World, In Search of Fly Water, Reel Adventures, Fly Fish TV, Fly Fish America and Ask About Fly Fishing Internet Radio. He was also a featured angler in the popular fly fishing movies Connect, Waypoints, Soulfish 2, Carpland, Evolution, Kendjam and Atlanticus. Jeff is constantly traveling and developing new techniques for catching the most exotic fish imaginable in places where even the most avid adventurers are hesitant to go. An IGFA World Record holder, Jeff has fished in 62 countries and caught over 400 species of fish on a fly.

You can follow Jeff's global fly fishing adventures, exploits, tips, advice, photography and story-telling on his expanding blog and informative web site:

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