

Use of Boto (*Inia geoffrensis*) as baite in fisheries in the Central Amazon

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INTRODUCTION

The fishery activities in the Amazon region call attention by its large diversity of ambient, number of fishing gear and fisherman, and species of prey. The trade of catfish (Siluriform) in the Occidental Amazon is made mainly in Leticia, Colombia, with the product leaving Brazil without official control, from the border of Brazil and Colombia, in Tabatinga.

Colombia is therefore, an important buyer of catfish from the Brazilian Amazon, promoting an intensive market to the Brazilian fisherman of the Amazon river and its tributaries. The "piracatinga" or "mota" (*Callophysus macropterus*), Fig. 1) is the main target of this fishery, highly appreciated by Colombians.



Figure 1. Piracatinga -*Callophysus macropterus*.

The Boto flesh is considered very good as bait to fish *piracatinga*, a scavenger fish that eat dead bodies, because of its firm consistency, strong smell and abundant grease.

Studies from Projeto Boto revealed that communities around the Japurá and Amazon rivers, above the city of Tefé-AM, are practicing this activity over a decade and that is spreading fast to other areas of the Amazon region.

The aim of this study, was to gather information on the communities and fisherman killing botos to use their carcasses as bait to catch the *piracatinga* in Central Amazon, in order to establish a strategy to stop this predatory activity preserving the Amazon river dolphin.

METODOLOGY

Two expeditions of 10 days each in 2006 and 2009 were performed margining the Japurá and the Amazon rivers (Fig. 2). For each trip we use a small regional wood boat to avoid alert the locals of our presence. Along the trip we recorded all wood boxes (Fig. 3) employed to catch and store the *piracatinga*. When possible, we stopped in the communities to have informal conversation (Fig.4) about the use of the boxes, the volume of fish caught/night, bait employed and other information on the fishery and the economic

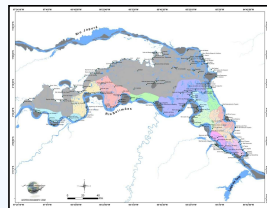


Figure 2. Study Area.



Figure 3. Boxes employed for fishing and storing *piracatinga* before guts removal.



Figure 4. Informal conversation with fisherman in a community in the Japura River.

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

We traveled around 550 km in each trip, visiting 26 and 32 communities in 2006 and 2009 respectively (Fig. 5). We found at least one box per community (Tab. 1). In few communities each fisherman has its own box, but in general the box is used collectively and several times per week during high season.

Table 1. Percentage of boxes recorded in the visited communities.

YEAR	Presence of Box	Absence of Box	Not seen
2006			
2009	68 %	25%	7%

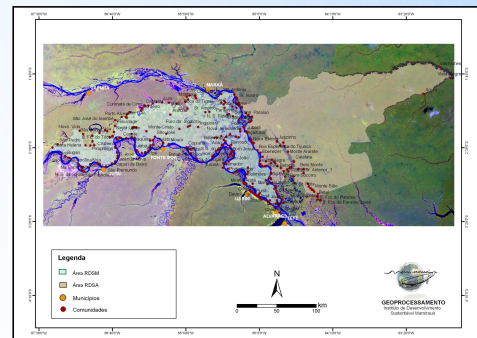


Figure 5. Communities visited during the two expeditions (2006-2010).

Few fishermen confirmed the use of boto meat as bait to catch *piracatinga*, mentioning the difficulty to hunt both caimans and botos. This can be due to the fact that they know it is an illegal activity. Nevertheless, during the interview, they also report that these are the two more abundant and easier species to catch in the region confirming that the meat of the boto yield more fish in less time.

With the carcass of one large adult boto it is possible to catch in 3 hours over one ton of *piracatinga*. With one caiman of the same size about half of this catching. The price of *piracatinga* varies from US\$ 0,50 during dry season to US\$ 1,00 during high water when fishing is more difficult. The "boss" or the fish buyer, set up a floating house (Fig. 6) to buy all fish caught by the locals in that area. He provides the ice and the icebox, employing one person of the community to be in charge. When the boxes are full is transported to the main freezing plant. This process stop the fisherman to go to the nearest tow to sell his fish.

The figure of the professional boto hunter was found as a new occupation, with one medium size boto costing US\$ 50,00 (Fig.7) while a large caiman US\$ 25,00.



Figure 6: Floating house where they buy fish and provide the ice to the fisherman.



Figure 7. Head of a juvenile boto sold to be used as bait.

CONCLUSIONS

The number of communities engaged in this activity is increasing. This is probably due to the facility to sell the fish, to obtain the bait and by the lack of reinforcement of the law.

According to Projeto Boto data, the boto population in this region is being reduced dramatically. It is imperative that alternatives to the *piracatinga* fishery should be found in collaboration with local fisherman to give them a chance of use a different baits. The *piracatinga* is abundant and its fishery is not forbidden.

A strong awareness of this situation should be raised with all communities in the area, explaining the importance of the boto for the aquatic ecosystem, teaching the existing law and the consequences of this killing.

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