

# Peacock Bass

*Cichla ocellaris*

**Order:** Perciformes

**Family:** Cichlidae

**Description:** The peacock bass derives its name from the large conspicuous, black mark (outlined in gold) on its tail, which resembles the "eye" on the plume of a peacock's tail. Hence the name, "peacock bass." It generally has a dark greenish-black or bronze back and a light, white belly with the underside being golden, yellow, light chartreuse, pink or blood red. The main body can be green, yellow, gold or dark black, with dusky, black, vertical bars along the sides.

## Special Features:

- **Feeding** – Peacock bass are exceptionally adaptable because they are voracious predators and will often pursue prey larger than themselves.
- **False Eye** - The prominent "false eye" on the tail is actually a deceptive target for predators.
- **Coloration** – The irregular patterns and vivid shades of green, blue, orange and gold obscure the actual eye and detract from its prominence.
- **Weight** - In their native range, some species grow to a maximum size of 35 lbs, whereas other species average 2-4 lbs.

**Similar Species:** The taxonomy of peacock bass species is uncertain, and several possible species, including the five prominent ones, have not been thoroughly identified and described.

**Range and Habitat:** A native of the Amazon River, the peacock bass is an exotic freshwater cichlid in Florida. It inhabits marginal lagoons during the dry season and flooded forests during the rainy season. In the lagoons, it swims in the early morning and at the end of the day. When the

sun is at its height, Peacock bass go to the middle of the lagoons. In rivers without lagoons, it protects itself from currents by remaining behind rocks and sticks. It is not keen on fast-flowing water.

**Reproduction:**

The peacock bass is a substrate spawner, with approximately 2000-3000 eggs per brood. Breeding pairs guard their clutch for approximately nine weeks, at which time the fry move from open waters to areas rich in vegetation along banks. As is the case with most cichlids, breeding pairs are highly territorial and aggressive.

**Notes:**

- **Common Names** – Tucunare or Pavon
- **To Be or Not to Be a Bass?** - The peacock bass is not a member of the bass family at all. It is just one of the 1,600 plus members of the family of fish called cichlids.
- **Introduction** – Peacock bass are the only species of cichlid deliberately introduced into the United States out of the 13 species found here. Released in 1984 by the Florida Game and Freshwater Fish Commission, they were the first exotic species legally introduced into Florida waters. The Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission obtained the breeding stock from several regions of South America. The progeny were released into open waters primarily as a sport fish, but there was also a hope that peacock bass would prey on and control other introduced cichlids.