

Kings of the tankbusters

What starts life as small may become unmanageably large in your aquarium. Nathan Hill offers a chilling warning.

Numbering almost 32,000 known species, fish make up the world's largest group of vertebrates. Surprisingly, from such a huge selection, we still choose species that have little or no use in the home aquarium. Typically, the strongest reason for fish unsuitability is ultimate size. After all, a lot of them get very large... Ask yourself how big each of the fish in your tank would become. Would your guess be correct for every one? Sometimes, even the most innocuous-looking species can be more than a handful. Take the irresistibly cute baby Oscar. Many an aquarist has been captivated by the juvenile charms of these pretty fish which simply brim with character — only to find, months later, that a solitary, boisterous resident is rapidly outgrowing its home. Just how large can some typical giants grow? I've compared regular hobby fish alongside

some true freshwater leviathans, such as the now endangered yet imposing Mekong giant catfish, the Pla beuk. This is not seen in the trade, but the similarly intimidating *Pangasius hypothalamus* is still occasionally sold, often by some unwitting retailers to some equally unwitting newcomers. It can be hard to gauge just how big these fish are without some form of comparison, so I have included a man of 1.83m/6' height as a benchmark. When you can see how he's dwarfed by some of our pets, the reality hits home. Clearly some should stay in their rivers of origin — not our 120 x 60 x 60cm/48 x 24 x 24" aquariums. Even some fish not considered true giants

appear unrealistically big when seen this way. Many aquarists aspire to keep fish such as the Mbu puffer, but do we really have the space for a fish that will grow as large as a small dog? The sizes indicated here are close to true representation, but not exact. Usually, we would not include the caudal (tail) fin in measurements of length, but here have left them in. Size references are given on Fishbase.de, but other sources may note differences erring on the smaller side. The smallest fish illustrated here is the South American Candiru at full potential adult size. This famously invades the urinary tracts of humans and seeing it compared this way is enough to make the eyes water!

88%
...of the fish highlighted on these pages are readily available to the industry — and one of those exceptions is the smallest here...

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