

River capture in the Amazon

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Video Byte

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Abstract

The Amazon River drainage basin is the largest river system in the world. New research suggests that the Amazon is rerouting water from a neighboring river in a phenomenon called "river capture." River capture can cause rivers to change course or reverse flow direction and forge new waterways for fish and other organisms to travel through. But the process of river capture is rarely observed and poorly understood. Now, researchers think they've identified a river capture in action. The Rio Casiquiare is rerouting water from the Rio Orinoco into an Amazon tributary. All the water in the upper Rio Orinoco is expected to change course. If this happens, the Amazon will acquire an additional ~40,000 km² of drainage area, creating a river network of astonishing proportions. Stokes, et al. Ongoing River Capture in the Amazon. (2018) Geophysical Research Letters