



Largemouth Bass

Micropterus salmoides

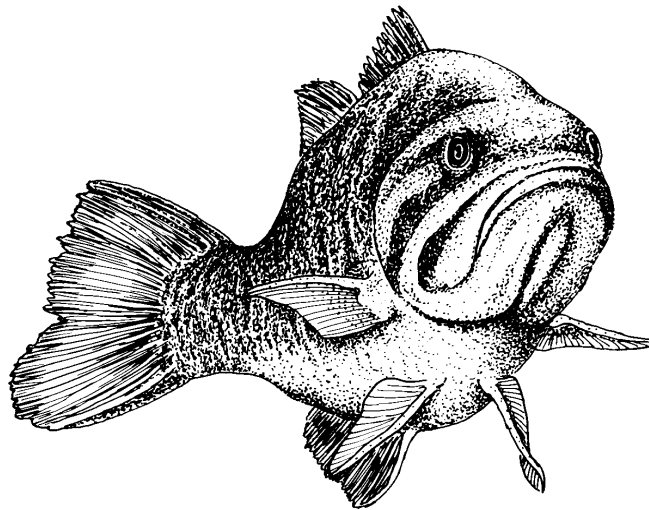
Largemouth bass are the most sought-after freshwater gamefish in the United States. There are several reasons for the popularity of this fish. Anglers can usually find waters that contain largemouth bass within a short distance from their homes; they can catch bass that regularly reach trophy size (7 to 15 pounds); and these fish are exciting to catch, with a battle characterized by head shaking and explosive leaps from the water.

History and Status

The largemouth bass is a native species of North Carolina. In North America it was originally found from southeastern Canada through the Great Lakes; south down the Mississippi Valley to Mexico and Florida; and up the Atlantic Coast as far north as Maryland. As the fish grew in popularity with anglers, it was stocked in other areas and today is found throughout the continental United States and Hawaii, and southeastern Canada. It has also been stocked in Europe, Asia, Africa and South America.

Range and Distribution

In North Carolina, the largemouth bass is found in ponds, reservoirs, streams and rivers throughout the state, as well as in brackish coastal waters alongside saltwater species. Populations are considered good in every area of North Carolina, with the best populations occurring in the Piedmont and Coastal Plain. Bass tend to grow faster and larger in reservoirs, although large fish



are also common in many farm ponds and in some coastal rivers.

Description

Largemouth bass belong to a group of fish collectively called black basses. Other black basses found in North Carolina include the smallmouth and spotted bass. All black bass belong to the sunfish family, but are distinguished from other sunfish by their elongated bodies. Largemouth are distinguished from other black basses by means of the lower jaw, which is longer than those of other basses. The largemouth is also a bigger species than the smallmouth or spotted bass. There are two subspecies of largemouth bass: the Florida largemouth and the northern largemouth.

Habitat and Habits

The largemouth bass prefers habitat with lots of structure. This structure may be in the form of weed beds, sunken logs, rocks, brush and standing timber. It uses structure as cover for ambush sites and to hide from larger predators.

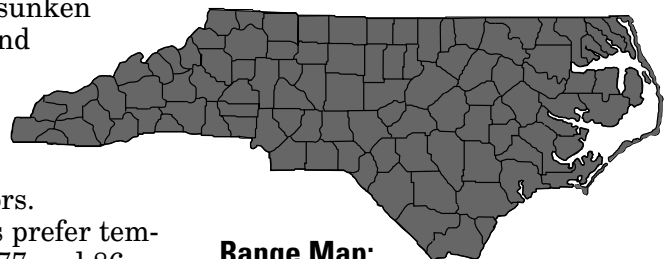
Largemouth bass prefer temperatures between 77 and 86 degrees. Bass seldom feed at

temperatures below 50 degrees and cannot survive for long at temperatures above 98 degrees.

When water temperatures approach 60 degrees in the spring, male bass swim onto the spawning grounds. Male bass spend several days selecting their nest sites. The beds are usually in 1 to 4 feet of water, but they may be deeper in clear water.

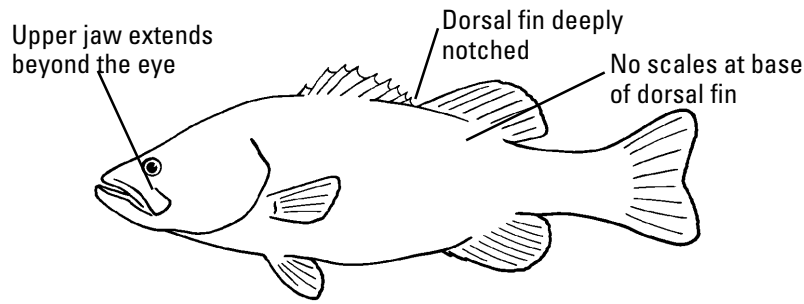
Spawning begins when the water reaches 63 to 68 degrees and remains in this range for several days. A female largemouth lays between 2,000 and 7,000 eggs per pound of body weight. She may lay all her eggs in one nest or spread them over several nests. Following spawning, she returns to deep water where she does not eat for two to three weeks.

The male guards the nest, fanning the eggs with his tail to keep off silt and debris. He will attack anything that swims near



Range Map:

Found statewide.



LARGEMOUTH BASS

Classification

Class: Osteichthyes (bony fishes)
Order: Centrarchidae (sunfish)

Average Size

2 to 3 pounds; the world-record largemouth weighed 22 pounds, 4 ounces. The North Carolina record is 15 pounds, 14 ounces.

Food

Worms, salamanders, frogs, crayfish, snakes, ducklings, insects and fish.

Breeding

Spawning season occurs in spring when water temperatures reach 63 degrees. Female deposits eggs in nest guarded by male bass. From 2,000 to 12,000 fry hatch. Only five to 10 will reach 10 inches.

Young

Called fry. Feed on zooplankton until 2 inches. Convert to fish and insect diet at this size.

Life Expectancy

Females live longer than males. In North Carolina, 10 years is long-lived. Most survive only 3 to 4 years.

the nest. Despite the male's vigilance, many eggs are eaten by other fish species. Hatching time for bass eggs depends on water temperatures. If the water is 72 degrees, eggs will hatch in only two days, but they take five days to hatch in water around 67 degrees. Approximately 2,000 to 12,000 fry hatch from each nest. Of these, however, only five to 10 are likely to survive to reach a size of 10 inches.

Newly hatched largemouths feed on tiny crustaceans and other zooplankton until they reach 2 inches in length. Young largemouths eat insects and small fish, including smaller bass. The adult largemouths will eat almost anything alive that will fit in their mouths. Fish, worms, frogs, insect larvae, crayfish, salamanders, snakes, small mammals, birds and ducklings are eaten at times. Anglers use a variety of natural baits and artificial lures to catch largemouths.

Springtime movements center around spawning when bass move from deep to shallow water. During the summer months, bass will be active in shallow waters during the morning and afternoons, but may move to deeper water at midday, when the water temperature increases in the shallows. When the water starts to cool in the fall, bass will return to the shallows to look for food. As the water temperatures decrease during the winter months, bass will become more sluggish and their metabolism will slow down, and they will require less food. They may become active during winter

months if several days of warm weather heat the water temperatures above 50 degrees.

People Interactions

Largemouth bass have had a tremendous influence on many people. Tackle manufacturers, boat dealers and bait shops all provide specialized gear for largemouth bass fishing, and many people make their livelihood from the industries that have grown up around bass fishing. Although water pollution is a real threat to bass and other fish populations in some waters, the largemouth bass is an adaptable species and, overall, its future looks bright.

References

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Credits

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