

Smallmouth Bass – *Micropterus dolomieu*

Distribution – Native range from Minnesota to southern Quebec south to the Tennessee River system in Alabama and west to eastern Oklahoma. Transplanted throughout North America. Common in reservoirs in the southwest. The smallmouth bass is generally green with dark vertical bands rather than a horizontal band along the side. There are 13-15 soft rays in the dorsal fin, and the upper jaw never extends beyond the eye.

Micropterus is Greek meaning "small fin" [see Guadalupe bass for further explanation]. The species epithet *dolomieu* refers to the French mineralogist M. Dolomieu. Smallmouth bass prefer large clear-water lakes (greater than 100 acres, more than 30 feet deep) and cool streams with clear water and gravel substrate. In small streams a fish's activity may be limited to just one stream pool or extend into several. Spawning occurs in the spring.

Food Habits – Smallmouth bass are carnivorous and feed on a variety of animals such as other fish, crayfish, reptiles, amphibians, small mammals.

Life History - When water temperatures approach 60°F males move into spawning areas. Nests are usually located near shore in lakes; downstream from boulders or some other obstruction that offers protection against strong current in streams. Mature females may contain 2000-15,000 golden yellow eggs. Males may spawn with several females on a single nest. On average each nest contains about 2,500 eggs, but nests may contain as many as 10,000 eggs. Eggs hatch in about 10 days if water temperatures are in the mid-50's (°F), but can hatch in 2-3 days if temperatures are in the mid-70's (°F). Males guard the nest from the time eggs are laid until fry begin to disperse, a period of up to a month.

Sport Fishing - Because of its excellent sporting reputation, smallmouth bass have been stocked throughout the United States and Arizona. Minnows, crayfish, and alderfly larvae (hellgrammites) are among the most successful live baits used. Smallmouth bass now rank among the top 15 most preferred species.

Life Span – Smallmouth live on average 6 – 14 years. Some specimens have been determined to be 20 years old.

Threats – Over-fishing and habitat loss. Smallmouth bass prefer cool low turbidity waters. Declines in water quality can negatively affect smallmouth bass populations.