

## **Largemouth Bass – *Micropterus salmoides***

***Distribution*** – Original range from northeastern Mexico to Florida, most of Mississippi River, north to southern Quebec and Ontario and the Atlantic from Florida to southern or central South Carolina. Now found in all states of the United States and southwestern provinces of Canada. South to Central and South America. The Black or Largemouth Bass, one of the most highly sought sport fishes in the United States, is caught with live and artificial bait. It is more tolerant of warm water than the smallmouth bass, but at higher temperatures it becomes less active. Adults feed primarily on other fishes. Grows to 3'2" (97 cm); 22 1/4 lbs (10.1 kg). Moderately deep, robust; back olive to dark green, mottled; sides greenish yellow with dark midlateral stripe; head greenish gold. Mouth large, extends beyond posterior edge of eye. 14-15 pectoral soft rays; median fins olive; dorsal fins almost separate, 10 spines, 12-13 soft rays, 3 anal fin spines, 11 soft rays. Lateral line complete, 59-77 scales; 7-9 scale rows above lateral line, 14-17 below; no scales on bases of soft dorsal and anal fins; 24-28 caudal peduncle scale rows.

***Identification:*** Along with growing larger than the smallmouth bass, the largemouth is more rotund and less flattened laterally (side to side) than other members of the sunfish family. The largemouth's head and back are a bright-green to olive-green. Its sides are lighter green, and the belly is whitish or pale-yellow. The largemouth's upper jaw extends beyond the back edge of its eye. It has a broad black stripe or a line of broken splotches running along its side from head to tail. In the largemouth, the two sections of the dorsal fin are nearly separate. The largemouth bass lives in suitable warmwater habitat, which is usually a pond or small, weedy lake. It is also found in the shallow backwaters and coves of large lakes and in the sluggish sections of big rivers. Largemouths are almost always associated with aquatic weeds, a soft bottom or stumps and downed logs. They are rarely found over rocks or in depths of more than 20 feet.

***Food Habits*** – Preys on invertebrates, mollusks, crayfish, fish, amphibians, reptiles, small mammals, and birds – basically anything it can get into its mouth once the prey falls or moves into the water where a bass is lying.

***Life history*** - In true sunfish style, the male largemouth fans a circular nest for spawning and aggressively defends the nest site, eggs and young fish. Largemouth bass spawn in spring and early summer, when water temperatures remain at 60 degrees for about three days. The typical nest is on gravel, sand or even soft mud. It is two to three feet in diameter, about six inches deep, and in one to four feet of water. Spawning typically occurs within eight feet of a shoreline and keep their nests at least 20 feet apart. Several largemouth bass females may spawn on one nest, each contributing 2,000 to 7,000 eggs per pound of body weight. Egg hatching takes about 10 days in 65-degree water. The young largemouths stay at the bottom of the nest for about a week, until the yolk sac is absorbed. Then they rise above the nest in a school and begin feeding. The male continues to guard them for as long as a month. Young bass feed on zooplankton, insects and small fishes, and they are cannibalistic on one another. Frequently, spring lake conditions determine the abundance of these forage items. Thus, the abundance of these forage items also determines the abundance of young largemouth bass. The number of young largemouth bass produced each year varies according to lake conditions and

ultimately leads to changes in adult largemouth bass abundance.

***Life Span*** - The average life span is about 16 years.

***Sport Fishing*** - Attention-attracting, splashy surface plugs, minnow-like lures and soft-plastic worms or other slithery imitations, snaked through the weeds, all appeal to the aggressive largemouth.

***Threats*** – Over-fishing, pollution, habitat loss.