



Brown Trout

BY TERRY B. JOHNSON, NONGAME BRANCH CHIEF
ILLUSTRATION BY ZACKERY ZDINAK

SCIENTIFIC NAME: *Salmo trutta*.
From the Latin words for salmon and trout.

DESCRIPTION: "Brown" hardly does justice to this beautiful fish. The olive-brown body has yellowish sides marked by dark spots and by orange to red spots that are often encircled by light yellow or white. Brown trout average 6-7 pounds by their sixth year. The current Arizona record is 22 pounds, 14.5 ounces, compared to the world record of 40 pounds, 4 ounces.

DISTRIBUTION: Brown trout are native to Europe and western Asia, and have been widely introduced elsewhere since the 1800s. In the United States, they occur in most suitable cold-water habitats available for stocking. Since 1931, more than 11 million have been stocked in

Arizona, in more than 130 waters. Stockings have been reduced here in recent years to fewer than 10 waters due to concerns about impacts on other fish, especially native species. Some of our best brown trout fishing waters, however, are those that harbor self-sustaining populations, such as Black River, Bright Angel, East Clear Creek, Oak Creek, West Fork of Oak Creek, Chevelon Lake, and the creek above the lake. The state record was taken from Reservation Lake on the Fort Apache Indian Reservation.

HABITAT: Although brown trout occupy rivers and larger streams in many parts of their range, lakes are their main strongholds in Arizona. The key to their success is cold water; temperatures of 54 to 66 degrees are optimal. Anglers often take them by trolling deeper waters, but twilight fishing near downed logs and stumps along banks, and near the mouths of streams, can also be productive.

BIOLOGY: Well-developed teeth line the jaws and mouth of this predator, and anything smaller than the fish itself is likely to become prey. Smaller fish are a diet mainstay, but frogs, crayfish, invertebrates, small mammals, and even

ducklings may also serve as lunch.

Brown trout reach sexual maturity in their third or fourth year, and generally spawn in late fall. The female excavates the redd (nest) in gravel at the head of a riffle or mouth of a stream, usually at depths of about 20 inches, and deposits 400 to 2,000 or more yellowish-orange eggs. The nest is left unguarded, and at about 33 days the eggs begin to hatch. The fry take cover in slower waters, and feed on ever-larger aquatic and terrestrial invertebrates as they grow, eventually adding vertebrates to their menu.

STATUS: In Arizona, the brown trout is a welcome surprise for the angler's creel because of its size, spirit, and beauty, but it is not rare here. It is simply more difficult to catch than the more ubiquitous and widely-stocked rainbow trout. In any case, the species is certainly not endangered or threatened, although it sometimes feeds on species that are.

MANAGEMENT NEEDS: Selective stocking, limited seasons, and conservative bag and possession limits have historically been the mainstays of brown trout management in Arizona's state and tribal waters. State management has moved toward long-term balance with native fish conservation by setting aside some waters for brown trout and other non-native salmonids, and other waters for native fishes, including the Apache and Gila trout. Protecting anglers' interests and conserving native fish are both fundamental to the Department's legal and ethical mission. 🦅

