

Largemouth Bass

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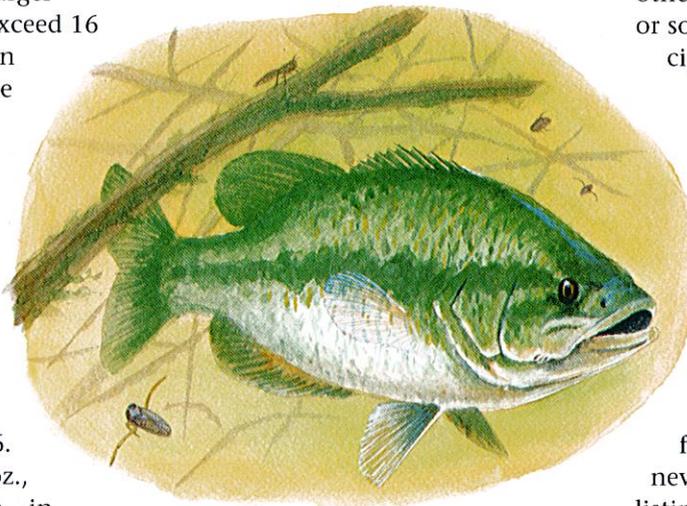
Scientific name: *Micropterus salmoides*. Genus and specific epithet of Greek/Latin origin, meaning (respectively) “small finned” and “salmon-like.”

Description: Largemouth bass are in the sunfish family. Small ones are streamlined; bigger ones are stockier, sometimes almost football-like. Females live longer and attain larger sizes than males. Few males exceed 16 inches in length; females often exceed 22 inches. Yearlings are 6-10 inches long. At 20-23 inches an adult female should be 4-7 pounds, and at 25-28 inches a 10-16 pound trophy. The Arizona records are: Inland Waters, 16 lb., 7.68 oz., 28.0 in. Canyon Lake, Randall E. White, April 1997; Colorado River, 16 lb., 14 oz., 28.25 in., near Yuma, Dale Uden, March 1996. The world record is 22 lb., 4 oz., a giant taken—and later eaten—in Georgia by George Washington Perry, in 1932. Largemouths are typically dark olive to greenish-brown above and on the upper sides, with a broad, dark horizontal band on each side, shading to a white belly. The dorsal fin is deeply notched. The tail tends to be squared off. On adults, the jaw extends past the rear margin of the eye.

Distribution: Largemouths historically occurred throughout the Mississippi River drainage, the Great Lakes, southern Canada, and northern Mexico. Now they occur in 49 states (not Alaska), most of Mexico, Central and South America, various African countries, Europe, the former Soviet Union, Japan, and elsewhere in temperate to subtropical climates. The Arizona range, which started with a stocking in 1897, is now virtually statewide

below the Rim, and selected waters along the Rim from Flagstaff to the White Mountains, with the Colorado, Gila, Salt, and Verde rivers and their impoundments being the core areas.

Habitat: Largemouths favor quiet waters in ponds, lakes, impoundments, and rivers. Depending on flows,



season, and temperature, they range from deep pools to open water to shallow flats. They most often associate with structure and cover, but may also suspend in deep open water.

Biology: A sight feeder, the largemouth is carnivorous from fry (baby) to hawg (huge old ones). Prey size increases as they grow. Crayfish, shad, sunfish, and other fishes are dietary mainstays. Frogs, snakes, birds, bats, mice, insects, and virtually everything else in the water may also be taken.

Arizona largemouth egg production begins in winter. Spawning occurs from February into summer, depending on water temperatures, flows, moon phase, etc. Most spawning beds are on flats and shelves in water a few inches to 20 or so feet deep. Males

fertilize the eggs as they are laid, 5,000-14,000 at a time over three to five days, and defend the nests and fry for another two to four weeks. Of 100,000 or so eggs produced by a mature female each year, only a few fry survive to yearlings. Along the way to maturity, largemouths fall prey to every predator in the water, including other largemouths. Once one attains 5 or so pounds, anglers become its principal predator.

Status: Largemouths are common in Arizona. Populations cycle in response to changes in water abundance and quality, cycles in other species of fishes (both predatory and prey), and countless other factors. Disease has not been a problem here, but is a factor elsewhere. Legally a “sport fish” in Arizona, the largemouth never has been a candidate for federal listing as threatened or endangered and is not a species of special concern in Arizona.

Management needs: Population and catch-rate information from surveys helps define management alternatives for each water. Management in Arizona largely consists of: initial stocking, monitoring, adjusting catch limits to angler pressure, and managing other species of fish for compatibility with long-term largemouth objectives. Voluntary catch-and-release helps sustain catch rates for larger fish, and more angler participation in catch-and-cook for smaller size classes would benefit many waters. ♣

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Nongame Branch Chief Terry B. Johnson escapes the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune by taking arms against a sea of bass and by opposing ends them.