

FISH

**Status: Native to South Dakota
Introduced Statewide**

LARGEMOUTH BASS

(Micropterus salmoides)

Description

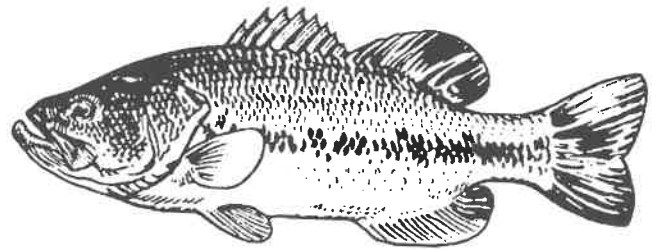
Largemouth bass are moderately large, *robust* fish that frequently grow to weigh five pounds (2.3 kg) or more in the northcentral Great Plains. They are deeper bodied than the similar looking smallmouth bass. Their lower jawbone extends to or beyond the rear margin of the eye. Largemouth bass do indeed have a large mouth.

The *dorsal* surface and sides range in color from bright green to olive to lighter green or golden green. Generally, large fish are darker in color than small fish. The *ventral* surface is white to yellow. A faint, dark horizontal stripe may be present on the sides. The eye is brown. Adults living in clear, weedy water tend to be fairly dark in color with obvious black markings. Those found in muddy water are overall a pale green.

Distribution

Largemouth bass are native to the eastern half of the United States. They have been stocked widely in all of the continental states.

Largemouth bass are found throughout South Dakota. They are common to stock dams and reservoirs west of the Missouri River and reservoirs and natural lakes east of the River. They are not abundant



in the Missouri River reservoirs, except for the upper, western-most end of Lewis and Clark Lake in southeastern South Dakota.

Natural History

Largemouth bass are nest builders, a trait of members of the sunfish family, to which they belong. Nesting begins in the spring, when the water temperature nears 60° F (15.6° C). The male uses his tail to clear a 2 to 3 foot (61 to 91 cm) diameter basin in the bottom of a shallow, sheltered bay. After the male has found a female to deposit her eggs, he guards the nest and resulting *fry* until the young fish scatter.

Largemouth bass normally are found in the upper levels of warm water in small lakes, shallow bays of large lakes, and in large, slow rivers. Rarely are they found

deeper than 20 feet (6.1m). They prefer areas of soft bottom with stumps or *emergent* or *submergent vegetation*, such as water lilies, cattails, and pond weeds.

Largemouth bass are *carnivorous* and feed on all sorts of animal life. Young fish feed on *plankton* and insects. Adult fish eat perch, minnows, small sunfish, bullheads, and any unsuspecting small animals that come within striking distance. Feeding occurs at water temperatures above 50° F (10° C). Almost no feeding takes place during the winter, when their metabolism is decreased.

Growth rates of largemouth bass are moderate in South Dakota. Fish reach approximately four inches (10 cm) in one year and twelve inches (30.4 cm) in four years. The biggest largemouth bass recorded for South Dakota was caught in 1993 in a Tripp County farm pond and weighed eight pounds fifteen ounces (4.1 kg). The world record largemouth bass is the legendary fish caught by George Perry in Montgomery Lake, Georgia in 1932. That fish weighted 22 pounds 4 ounces (10.1 kg). The next world record largemouth bass is being called the "million dollar fish," due to the popularity of bass fishing across the United States. A new world record largemouth bass could be worth a huge amount of money because of possible endorsement offers from fishing tackle and boat manufacturers.

Significance

Largemouth bass are a major sport fish and are widely distributed across South Dakota. While a wide distribution insures availability, bass fishing is a special skill that requires considerable ability for consistent success.

Largemouth bass are often stocked in combination with *pan fish* to serve as a *predator* on *pan fish* and keep the them from overpopulating and *stunting*. Largemouth bass have become a favorite for stocking in warm water farm ponds because of their fast growth and tolerance for high temperatures and moderate *turbidity*. The young of largemouth bass may serve as food for other predatory fish and birds, such as herons, kingfishers, and cormorants.

Conservation Measures

Largemouth bass are actively managed by the South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks. Fishery crews survey public waters to ensure that largemouth bass populations will remain healthy. Currently, anglers are limited to keeping five largemouth bass per day and having no more than 10 bass in possession east of the Missouri River, and 10 bass daily and 20 in possession west of the Missouri River. Hatcheries are able to raise *fingerlings* to be stocked in newly constructed waters and waters where fish-kills have occurred.

Glossary

Carnivorous - meat eating.

Dorsal - upper part.

Emergent - plants that grow through and then extend out of the water.

Fingerling - small, young fish.

Fry - newly hatched fish, usually less than 1 inch (25 mm) in length.

Pan fish - any small fish that can be fried whole in a pan.

Plankton - small, simple plants and animals that live in water.

Predator - an animal that kills and eats other animals.

Robust - full-bodied.

Stunting - abnormally slow growth.

Submergent - growing beneath the water.

Turbidity - cloudiness or muddiness of water.

Vegetation - plants.

Ventral - under part.

References

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- Tomelleri, Joseph R. and Mark E. Eberle. 1990. Fishes of the Central United States. University Press of Kansas, Lawrence.
- Willis, David W. and Robert M. Newmann. 1994. Largemouth bass and panfish management strategies for small impoundments and ponds in South Dakota. Department of Game, Fish and Parks, Wildlife Division, Special Report 94-2, Pierre.

Outreach

Blue Dog Lake Fish Hatchery, RR 1, Box 22A, Waubay, SD 57523
Gavins Point National Fish Hatchery, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, RR 1, Box 293, Yankton, SD 57078. Phone 665-3352.

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