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# Natural History Notes

MIKE DOMBECK grew up in the Moose Lake area and graduated from Hayward High School and the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. He has a B.S. degree in Biology and an M.S. degree in Aquatic Biology. He has taught Zoology at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point and is currently a fisheries biologist with the U.S. Forest Service, living in Munising, Michigan. Mike has also been an area fishing guide since his high school days.



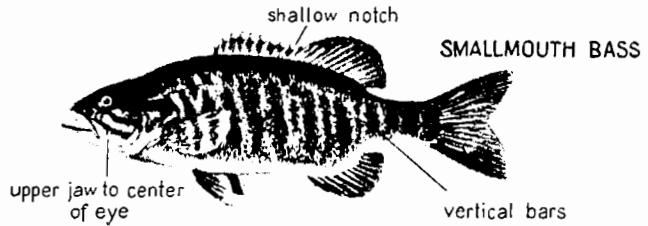
## THE SMALLMOUTH BASS

The smallmouth bass is considered by most anglers to be one of the most sporting of the world's game fishes. Many fishermen pursue the smallmouth with the same zealous enthusiasm as a musky fisherman pursuing his quarry. The original range of the smallmouth extends from New England to the Great Lakes area including southern Canada and south to the rivers of Tennessee, Arkansas and Oklahoma. Stocking has extended its range to the west coast and elsewhere. A key requirement for the smallmouth is clean cool water. It commonly inhabits medium sized lakes and fast flowing streams with gravel and boulder bottoms. Preferred water temperature of this species is 60° to 65° F. Smallmouth may seek a depth where the temperature is optimum providing other requirements are met. They like to keep cool, so when water temperatures are high during the summer they may be found in shaded spots beneath overhanging trees along a rocky ledge or in pools and eddies near swift currents.

Here in Wisconsin the smallmouth bass may reach a weight of up to 6 pounds and a length of 20 inches. A record fish would exceed 10 pounds in the north. Being a member of the sunfish family the smallmouth is related to the bluegill and crappie. However, its closest relative is the largemouth bass. The smallmouth is often recognized by its dark vertical bars and pale gold to olive brown coloring. Its color and markings will vary depending upon the fish's size and color of water it inhabits. The pronounced markings of a live fish fade quickly when the fish is caught and then dies. Thus the amateur angler may have difficulty distinguishing between the smallmouth and the largemouth bass. Remember, it is always the fisherman's responsibility to correctly identify species of fish and other living things and to know the regulations applying to each.

The smallmouth bass has a shallow notch separating the spiny dorsal from the soft dorsal fin, while the notch is deep in the largemouth. The upper jaw extends only to the center of the eye in the smallmouth, while it extends beyond the eye in the largemouth. Dark vertical bars on the smallmouth often differentiate it from the largemouth which often has a dark lateral band. But, be careful with this last characteristic since it may be very obscure in the dark waters common to this area.

Smallmouth spawn at temperatures of 60° to 65° F. over clean gravel and sand bottoms where there is a current. The male prepares the nest by fanning out debris and vegetation, making a



depression on the bottom. Territoriality is also exhibited during the spawning of smallmouth bass. Here the male will not tolerate neighbors within 30 feet and defends his spawning territory throughout the spawning season. If a sudden cold spell occurs during this time the spawning activity will cease and the eggs already laid will die. A second or even third spawn may occur later when the waters warm again. Thus, spawning may occur as late as July or even August during abnormal years.

In his book entitled, *Book of the Black Bass*, written in 1881, Henshall stated, "He is plucky, game, brave and unyielding to the last when hooked. He has the arrowy rush of the trout, and the bold leap of the salmon, while he has a system of fighting tactics peculiarly his own... I consider him inch for inch and pound for pound, the gamest fish that swims."

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