

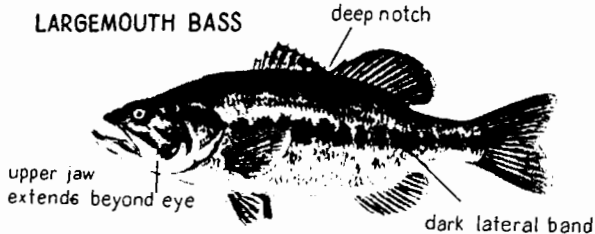
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Natural History Notes



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 presently a staff member of the University of Minnesota's Bell Museum of Natural History. Mike has also been an area fishing guide since his high school days.

THE LARGEMOUTH BASS



The largemouth bass is considered the king of freshwater game fishes by many anglers. Its popularity is partially due to its unusually wide range. It is found in waters from the Rockies to the East Coast and from Canada south to Florida and Mexico. They have been successfully introduced in Cuba and many parts of Europe and South Africa. The largemouth bass fisherman can go to almost any state in the Union and find his quarry. Being very adaptable, the largemouth is successful in new impoundments and common in lakes of all sizes. Largemouth bass are also found in slow moving rivers and streams.

Here in Wisconsin the largemouth may reach a weight of 8 pounds, and up to 15 and 20 pounds in the deep south. Being a member of the sunfish family the largemouth is related to the crappie and the bluegill. However, its closest relative is the smallmouth bass. The largemouth is often recognized by its dark lateral stripe but when taken from dark or muddy waters this dark stripe is often obscure. Thus many amateur anglers have difficulty distinguishing between the largemouth and the smallmouth. The largemouth bass has a deep notch separating the spiny dorsal from the soft dorsal fin, whereas the notch is shallow in the smallmouth. The upper jaw extends beyond the eye in the largemouth while in the smallmouth bass it extends only to the center of the eye. Compare these two species and the differences will become clearly evident.

The reproductive capacities of the largemouth are quite high. A three-pound female will lay approximately 40,000 eggs and larger females will lay twice that number. Their spawning is controlled mainly by weather conditions. When the water temperature nears 60° F., the males move onto the spawning areas which are found in sheltered bays with a depth of 2 to 6 feet. Largemouth also prefer to spawn in the leeward side of a lake. Thus if the prevailing southerly winds shift to the north, the spawning areas are likely to shift to the other side of

the lake. The male prepares the nest by fanning out debris and vegetation and makes a depression 2 to 3 feet in diameter. He will carry out any small pebbles and sticks to free the nest of any obstructions. Next he seeks a gravid female who deposits her eggs in the nest while he fertilizes them. The female then leaves and the male is left with the task of caring for and defending the eggs from predators. He fans the developing eggs to provide sufficient oxygen and prevent fungal growth. He violently attacks any intruders regardless of size. Guarding males usually will not eat the intruder, but merely seize and chew it, then carry it away and spit it out. It is easy to see why largemouth are most vulnerable to fishermen at spawning. Territoriality is also exhibited during the spawning of largemouth bass. Unlike many other species of the sunfish family who nest in colonies, the largemouth requires a distance of at least 30 feet from another nest. Territorial boundaries are set up during nest building and are defended throughout the spawning season. Largemouth are also very temperature sensitive at spawning time. If a sudden cold spell occurs during this time the spawning activity will cease and eggs already laid will die.

The largemouth bass has a well earned reputation among gamefishes as a ferocious fighter. They strike an angler's plug with a vigorous furor and if successfully hooked, the fight is on. Leaping, diving and darting give the fisherman a tremendous challenge. Largemouth fishing provides excitement and will test your skills; why not try it and find out for yourself what a thrill it can be?

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