

9/2/78

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 DARTERS

The darters are members of the second largest family of fishes in Wisconsin, the perch family. There are 18 different species belonging to the perch family. This group of fishes is surpassed only by the minnow family which has 45 species in Wisconsin. The darters are very common, but for the most part unknown to people who spend many days on or near our lakes and streams. The best known members of the perch family are the Walleye, Yellow Perch and Sauger. The remaining 15 species are the darters. In fact, the smallest fish in the state is the Least Darter which reaches a length of one to one and one-half inches, and is one of the smallest fishes in the world. No wonder the species name of this fish is *microperca*, meaning very small perch.

The following is a most appropriate description of the darters by a pioneer fish biologist. "These are the mountaineers among fishes. Forced from the populous and fertile valleys of the river beds and lake bottoms, they have taken refuge from their enemies in the rocky highlands, where the free waters play in ceaseless torrents, and there they have wrested from stubborn nature a meager living. Although diminished in size by their constant struggle with the elements they have developed an activity and hardihood, a vigor of life and a glow of high color, almost unknown among the easier livers of the lower lands."

Many of the darters inhabit the very swift waters, from the riffles of the smallest streams to the wildest rapids of large rivers. Of course, the advantages of living in such a place is that they have few competitors or enemies. They feed on insect larva and nymphs, small crustaceans, and other small animals inhabiting the same area. They also catch food as it drifts with the current. This type of habitat has other advantages. The gushing water in swift rapids is usually saturated with oxygen. There are many protected areas behind and under rocks of all sizes for these fishes to hide and rest. Like other bottom dwelling species of fishes, the darters have no air bladder, which makes them less buoyant and easier to rest on the bottom. Darters have adapted well to a most rigorous habitat.

Johnny Darter



Rainbow Darter



Some of the darters are the Crystal Darter, Gilt Darter, Fantail Darter, Iowa Darter, Rainbow Darter, and Johnny Darter. They range from one inch in length (the Least Darter) to five inches (the Crystal Darter). These little fishes are often mistaken for minnows because of their small size, but upon closer examination they can be easily distinguished. Like all members of the perch family they have two dorsal fins; the first contains spines and the second, soft rays. The anal and pelvic fins also have one or more spines. Male Rainbow Darters are among the most colorful of freshwater fishes. Darters are also important indicators of water quality for they live in clean pure water. No doubt you have seen a darter while gazing into a creek or river even if you didn't recognize it.

You may recognize a Johnny Darter from this description by David Starr Jordan: "You tried some time to put your finger on a little fish that was lying, apparently asleep, on the bottom of the stream, his tail bent around the stone as if for support against the force of the current . . . You were trying to catch a Johnny Darter. Nothing seems easier, but you did not do it."



Koerpel Funeral Home
 GEORGE A. KOERPEL
 Funeral Director
 OUR 31ST YEAR OF
 SERVICE TO THE AREA
 Phone 715-634-2263
 HAYWARD, WISCONSIN

On Main Street - Downtown Hayward
 Scheer's Open Evenings to 9:00 p.m.
Sundays to 3:00 p.m.
NORTHWOODS SPORTS
 Dick Scheer • Phone 634-8550

- FISHING TACKLE
- FISH LOCATORS
- REEL PARTS & BULK LINE
- ELECTRIC TROLLING MOTORS
- CYPRESS GARDEN SKIS & ACCESSORIES
- GUNS - AMMUNITION
- RELOADING SUPPLIES
- ARCHERY

The Largest Display of Mepps and Mr. Twister Baits in the North

One Stop Shopping for the Sportsman