



## FRESHWATER FISH OF AMERICA

# LARGEMOUTH BASS

*Micropterus salmoides* (Lacepede, 1802)



Largemouth bass. Photo credit: Sam Stukel/USFWS

### *Natural History*

Largemouth bass spawn in the spring, when water temperatures warm up to 59-75 degrees Fahrenheit. When preparing to spawn, male largemouth bass will begin nest building behavior. They hollow out a circular pizza-sized nest in the bottom substrate of the lake to help protect the eggs when they are fertilized. This nest building attracts a female, who will release a portion of her spawn over the nest while the male releases his milt to fertilize the eggs as they fall into the nest.

Females are periodic spawners. They spawn with several males in different nests over a period of a few days. The males will guard the eggs and the small transparent fish fry. The fry remain hidden in the nest substrate for several days until they become pigmented and disperse into the pond to search for food. The fry will remain in a school to protect themselves from predation and begin feeding. They first feed on small copepod and cladoceran zooplankton. When the fry reach 1.5 to 2 inches in length they will begin to feed on insect larvae and other fish.

### *Conservation*

Largemouth bass are one of the top recreational fish species in the United States. Many fishing tournaments focusing on largemouth bass are held throughout the country. As a result, they have been stocked throughout the U.S. to provide recreational fishing opportunities outside of their native range. Largemouth bass are primarily managed by recreational fishing regulations which outline the fishing seasons by creel limits and size limit. Usually during the spawning and nesting seasons, bass seasons are closed or harvest is restricted due to their aggressive reaction to anything approaching their nests. This aggressive behavior can result in a severe decline in breeding age male and female Largemouth bass.

## FACTS AT A GLANCE

**Size:** Common length for largemouth bass is 16 inches with the longest recorded specimen being 38.2 inches. The heaviest reported weight for a largemouth was 22 pounds. Largemouth bass maximum reported age is 23 years.

**Range:** The range of largemouth bass within North America extends from the St. Lawrence River, the Great Lakes, Hudson Bay (Red River) and into the Mississippi River basin. Largemouth bass are also found in Atlantic drainages from North Carolina to Florida and into northern Mexico.

**Habitat:** Largemouth bass inhabit clear, vegetated lakes, ponds, swamps, and the backwaters of pools, creeks and rivers. Largemouth bass prefer spawning areas with a firm bottom of sand, mud or gravel. Adult largemouth bass use submerged aquatic vegetation as cover to ambush prey and juvenile or young largemouth use aquatic weeds, tree limbs or submerged log or stumps as cover to escape predation. Dissolved oxygen is also an important hydrological condition essential to largemouth bass habitat. Largemouth bass grow best in temperate to subtropical waters, with northern fish taking many more years to reach a given size than fish living in warmer southern waters.

**Diet:** Adult largemouth bass feed on fish, crayfish, and frogs. With the young feeding on crustaceans, insects, and small fish. Largemouth bass are voracious eaters, with many different animals becoming prey to this fierce eater. Even terrestrial animals like snakes and mice. Largemouth bass normally do not feed during spawning or when the water temperature dips below 41 degrees Fahrenheit or above 98.6 degrees Fahrenheit.

<https://www.fws.gov/fisheries>  
September 2023



Largemouth bass. Photo credit: Spencer Neuharth/USFWS