

LARGEMOUTH BASS

in Texas



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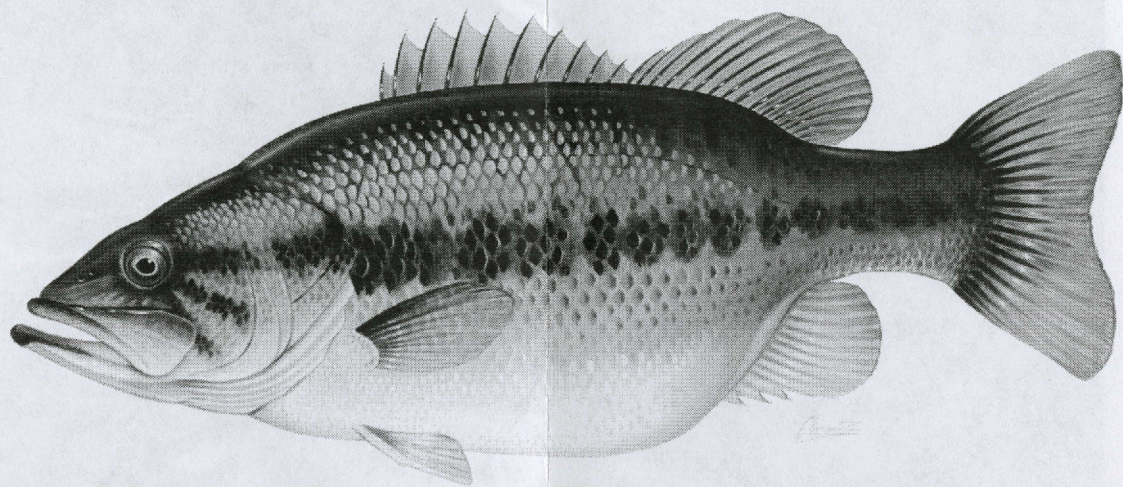
Billy Weems of Liberty Hill caught Toyota ShareLunker 514 from Lake Austin.

Largemouth Bass in Texas

The largemouth bass is the most popular freshwater sport fish in Texas. Found nearly everywhere in the state, this fighting fish lures resident anglers and visitors from across the United States. It plays a starring role in many fishing tournaments, both amateur and professional.

Largemouth bass (*Micropterus salmoides*) is one of the “black basses.” It’s actually a member of the sunfish family, not related to the true basses. Close relatives in Texas include the Guadalupe bass (our state fish), the spotted bass, and the introduced smallmouth bass.

Two subspecies of largemouth bass exist in Texas: the native *M. salmoides salmoides* and the Florida largemouth bass, *M. salmoides floridanus*. Our world-class bass fishery is a combination of nature and nurture, brought about by the combined efforts of the angling community and fisheries management professionals.



LARGEMOUTH BASS
Micropterus salmoides

IMPROVING POPULATIONS

At the beginning of the 20th century, Texas had only one natural lake - Caddo - and a handful of man-made reservoirs. The drought of the 1950s sparked new interest in reservoirs, and many were built in the 1960s and 1970s. Our native strain of largemouth bass was adapted to live in streams. To take advantage of the new habitat, Texas needed bass adapted to large lakes.

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department brought Florida largemouths to Texas in 1971 and stocked them into a few private lakes the following year. The fish thrived, and introductions into public waters followed. As Florida genes worked their way into the population, bass grew bigger. A 13.5-pound bass had held the Texas record since 1943. In 1980, an angler set a new record with a 14.1-pound catch. Over the next few years, that record was broken several times, leading up to the current state record, an 18.18-pound fish caught at Lake Fork in 1992.

BIOLOGY

As its name suggests, a largemouth bass can be distinguished from the other black basses by the size of its mouth: in a largemouth, the upper jaw extends well behind the rear margin of the eye. Largemouth bass also grow much bigger than their cousins. Individual fish may live up to 16 years. In many Texas reservoirs, a full-grown largemouth is the top predator in the ecosystem - until it meets a human with a fishing rod.

Micropterus salmoides is a warm-water species, well adapted to the Texas climate. Spawning begins in the spring when water temperatures reach about 60°F. This can occur as early as February or as late as May, depending on where one is in the state. Fish move into the shallows, which warm up first. Males build nests in 2 to 8 feet of water. A female deposits 2,000 to 43,000 eggs, and then the male chases her away and guards the nest. Eggs hatch in five to 10 days. Newly hatched fry remain in a group or "school" near the nest and under the male's watch

for several days. Fry feed primarily on zooplankton and insect larvae. At about 2 inches in length they become active predators. Adults feed almost exclusively on other fish and large invertebrates such as crayfish. Larger fish prey upon smaller bass.

FISHING TIPS

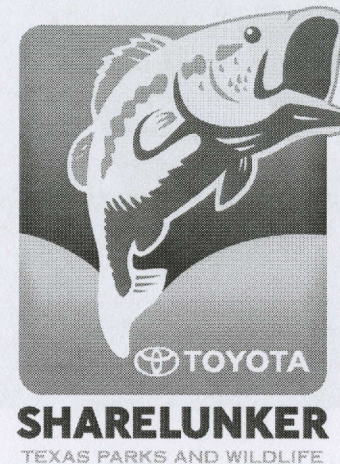
Bass hide among underwater plants, roots or limbs to stalk their prey. Look for them near structure. They are easier to catch early in the year, when spawning brings them into shallow water. By June, they start moving into deeper water.

March is the best time to catch a trophy-size bass. That's when the big females are most likely to be near the spawning areas, and they are heavy with eggs. However, bass of respectable size can be caught any time of year.

Bass are predators and will bite on many different kinds of lures, either because they look like food or as a reaction to movement. They will take natural baits like worms or minnows, too, but most bass anglers prefer to use artificial lures. Many anglers use top-water baits in low-light conditions and switch to spinner baits, hard-body lures or plastic worms or other creature baits later in the day.



Chase A. Fountain, © TPWD



TOYOTA SHARELUNKER PROGRAM

The ShareLunker Program offers bass anglers an opportunity to contribute to the future of Texas fishing. From October through April, an angler who catches a largemouth bass weighing 13 pounds or more may donate the fish to TPWD for research and breeding purposes.

ShareLunker is catch-and-release with a twist: instead of immediately going back into the lake, the trophy bass gets first-class lodging at the "Lunker Bunker" at Texas Freshwater Fisheries Center in Athens. Big pure Florida females are paired with pure Florida males for the spawning season, and their offspring are stocked into Texas waters. At the end of the season, most ShareLunkers are released into their home lakes. A few are kept on display at TFFC or donated to other aquarium exhibits.

Since the program began in 1986, more than 500 bass have been donated. For more information, visit www.tpwd.texas.gov/sharelunker/

REGULATIONS

Statewide, largemouth bass are subject to a minimum length of 14 inches and a combined daily bag limit of five fish for all black bass species. However, many Texas reservoirs have special length and bag limits designed to protect and enhance this popular fishery.

For detailed fishing regulations, visit www.tpwd.texas.gov/regulations/outdoor-annual

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