

Warmouth

Lepomis gulosus



PHOTO BY KONRAD SCHMIDT

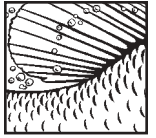


Warmouth are members of the sunfish family, which includes the largemouth bass. They are also known by more colorful local names such as redeye, goggle-eye, red-eyed bream, stump knocker, mudgapper, mo-mouth, morgan, molly, rock bass, open mouth, weed bass, wood bass, strawberry "perch" and mud bass.

Northern Pineywoods

Warmouth

Lepomis gulosus



APPEARANCE

Length: 4 to 10 inches (10.2 to 25 cm), but can grow to more than 12 inches (31 cm)

Weight: Up to 2.25 pounds (1 kg)

Distinguishing Characteristics

- Brownish back with pale sides marked with vertical bars, greenish yellow abdomen, and black spots mark the pelvic fin
- Three to five reddish-brown streaks radiate from eyes, and gill flaps are often red.
- "Ear flap" on gill cover is not extended
- Jaw extends to mid-point of eye
- Small patch of teeth on the tongue
- Three spines on the anal fin rays

LIFE HISTORY

Range: Great Lakes and Mississippi River basins from western Pennsylvania to Minnesota, south to the Gulf of Mexico; Atlantic and Gulf drainages from the Rappahannock River in Virginia to the Rio Grande in Texas and New Mexico

Diet: Young feed on zooplankton and small insects. Adults feed on insects, mollusks, and small fish.

Predators: Larger fish, water snakes, turtles, and herons

Sexual maturity: At 3 to 4 inches (7.5 to 10 cm)

Spawning season: In spring, when water temperatures reach 71° F (21.5° C), and continuing through the summer

Nests: Males construct a disc-shaped nest by fanning their tails and removing silt and debris over nesting site. Nests are made in 1.5 to 4 feet (0.45 to 1.23 m) of water near a stump, clump of vegetation or other large, submerged object.

Eggs: 4,000-63,000 eggs

Incubation: Three days

Young: The fry leave the nest five to six days after hatching and grow to 1 to 2 inches (25.4 to 50.8 mm) by the fall.

Life span: Not known

HABITAT

Warmouth prefer lakes, ponds, swamps and quiet areas of streams with muddy bottoms and vegetation.

BEHAVIOR

Warmouth are quite secretive. They seek cover in rocky banks, stumps or weeds, or near other large objects, where they can hide and wait for food. They are sight feeders. When in breeding condition, the males' eyes turn red. After the female lays her eggs, the male fertilizes the eggs and aggressively defends the nest, eggs and fry from any intruder—including other females.

NOW YOU KNOW!

- Warmouth *hybridize* (crossbreed) with bluegill and green sunfish.
- They can survive in polluted, low oxygenated waters where other sunfish cannot.
- Warmouth are often confused with rock bass. The difference between the two is in the anal fin: warmouth have three spines on the anal fin ray and rock bass have six spines.

WARMOUTH AND PEOPLE

Because warmouth hit hard and are easily caught, they are popular with some anglers. Their relatively small size keeps them from being more actively sought by most anglers.