

Pennsylvania's

BIGGEST LARGEMOUTH BASS

compilation and photos
by Art Michaels

When Where and How Anglers Caught Them

During the last five years, one Pennsylvania waterway has accounted for nearly one-fourth of all the largemouth bass that earned anglers a Commission Angler Award. In addition, anglers caught all their award-worthy bass statewide in no fewer than 103 different waterways, and of these waterways, 43 waterways accounted for at least two largemouths. And anglers caught all these fish on a wide variety of live baits and artificial lures. These findings suggest not only that large-

mouth bass are plentiful and that you can catch them just about anywhere in Pennsylvania, but that you can also catch a big one on an incredible variety of offerings.

All of this information came from Senior Angler and Catch-and-Release (C&R) Awards issued by the Commission for catches made from January 2000 through 2004. The Commission issued a total of 315 awards for largemouth bass caught during this period, including 257 Senior Angler and 58 C&R awards. Information from Junior Awards and First Fish Awards is not included here.

Largemouth Bass Regulations

Different sizes, seasons and creel limits apply to largemouth bass throughout the Commonwealth. Consult the 2005 *Summary of Fishing Regulations and Laws* on the Commission's web site, www.fish.state.pa.us, for these varied requirements:

- Commonwealth Inland Waters, including the Youghiogheny River Lake, but not including special-regulation areas.
- Delaware River and Estuary, including tributaries to their limits of tidal influence.
- Lake Erie, including tributaries, Presque Isle Bay and peninsular waters.
- Pymatuning Reservoir.
- Conowingo Reservoir up to Holtwood Dam
- Big Bass Program, which details regulations for selected Commonwealth rivers, streams and lakes.



Largemouths are plentiful in PA, and you can catch a big one just about anywhere in the state on a wide variety of offerings.

When

Anglers caught their largemouths year-round. In the five January months included in the information, anglers caught 25 bass; in February, 22; March, 15; April, 20; May, seven; June, 58; July, 49; August, 40; September, 29; October, 22; November, nine; and December, 19.

Records reveal that anglers caught 45 largemouths in the data's five December, January and February months. Of those 45, 33, or 73 percent, were caught in Lake Arthur, Moraine State Park, Butler County, and all of these fish were taken through the ice either with a minnow, a sucker or a chub. Watch the Jan/Feb 2006 *PA&B* for a feature on how to cash in on this fishing.

Where

Year-round, Lake Arthur accounted

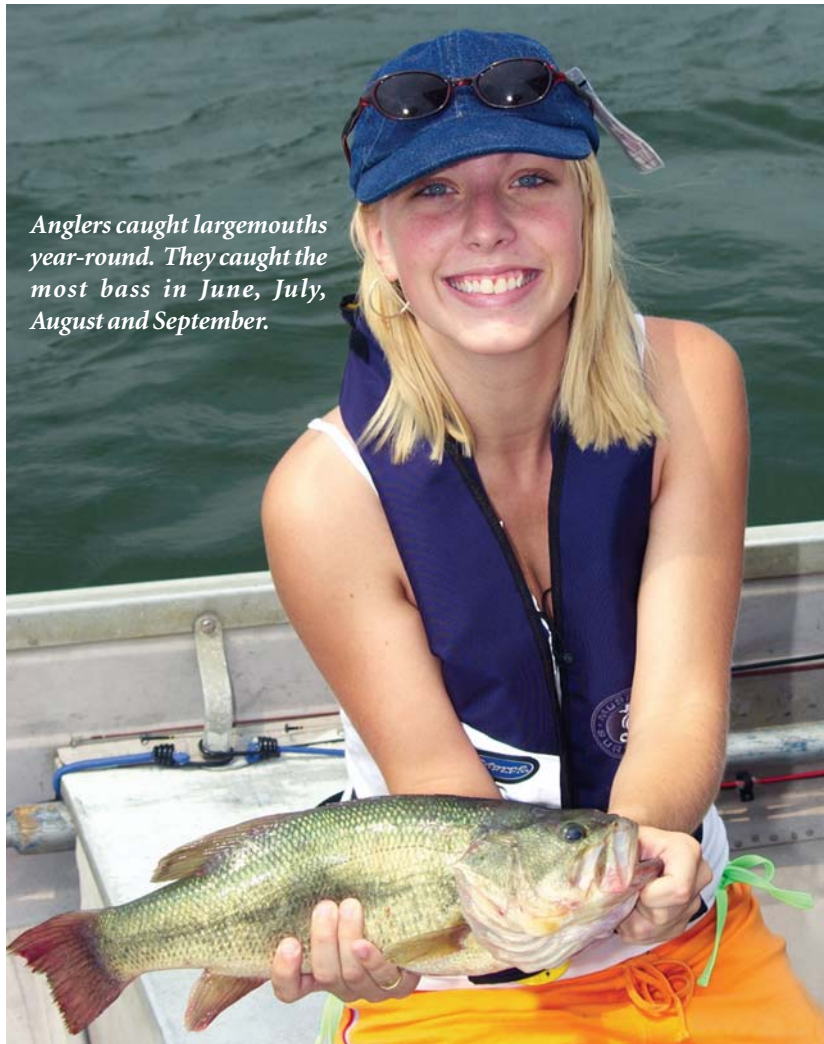
for 79 of the 315 fish—that's about one-fourth of all the bass in the data; Lake Wilhelm, Mercer County, accounted for 38; Cross Creek Lake, Washington County, 17; Lake Ontelaunee, Berks County, 10; Shohola Lake, Pike County, nine; Lake Nockamixon, Nockamixon State Park, Bucks County, eight; Conewago Lake, Pinchot State Park, York County, eight; Marsh Creek Lake, Marsh Creek State Park, Chester County, six; Beltzville Lake, Beltzville State Park, Carbon County, five; and Hills Creek Lake, Hills Creek State Park, Tioga County, four.

These waterways each accounted for three largemouths: Crooked Creek Lake, Armstrong County; George B. Stevenson Dam, Sinnemahoning State Park, Cameron County; Lake Wallenpaupack, Wayne/Pike County;

Minsi Lake, Northampton County; Pymatuning Reservoir, Pymatuning State Park, Crawford County; Raystown Lake, Huntingdon County; and Virgin Run Lake, Fayette County.

These waterways each accounted for two largemouths: Antietam Lake, Berks County; Bessemer Quarry, Lawrence County; Big Mill Creek, Elk County; Black Moshannon Lake, Black Moshannon State Park, Centre County; Canoe Lake, Canoe Creek State Park, Blair County; Conneaut Lake, Crawford County; Fairview Lake, Pike County; Faylor Lake, Snyder County; Glendale Lake, Prince Gallitzin State Park, Cambria County; Hereford Manor Lake, Beaver County; High Point Lake, Somerset County; Kettle Creek Lake, Kettle Creek State Park, Clinton County; Lake Minisink, Pike County; Leaser Lake, Lehigh County; Mauch Chunk Lake, Carbon County; Muddy Run Reservoir, Lancaster County; Pickerel Pond, York County; Quemahoning Reservoir, Somerset County; Raccoon Lake, Raccoon State Park, Beaver County; Ridgway Reservoir, Elk County; Stovers Dam, Lebanon County; Strip Mine Pond, Mercer County; Sugar Lake, Crawford County; Twin Lakes, Westmoreland County; and Walker Lake, Snyder County.

More than 60 other waterways statewide each accounted for one largemouth. The catches recorded in the Commission's Angler Awards Program reflect the largemouth bass's plentiful statewide distribution.



Anglers caught largemouths year-round. They caught the most bass in June, July, August and September.

Award Rules, Application

Visit the Commission's web site, www.fish.state.pa.us, for Angler Award Program qualifying minimum weights, rules and application. On the web site main page's left side, click on "Fishing." At the top of that page, click on "Biggest Fish of 2004" and navigate to the Angler Award Program rules and application. This information also appears on page 55 of the March/April 2005 *PA&B*. The web site includes separate rules and an application for state records, and a list of official measuring stations. The list of current Pennsylvania state-record fish also appears in the May/June 2005 *PA&B* on page 57.

Anglers caught 49 bass using jigs, and jig 'n pig specifically took 40 bass. Diving crankbaits took 30, and surface lures accounted for 18. Spinnerbaits took 16 bass, and buzzbaits took six. However, anglers caught 90 largemouths with minnows, which means that about 29 percent of all the bass caught were taken with a minnow.



Largemouth Bass Fast Facts

- Largemouth bass are members of the sunfish family. In Pennsylvania the sunfish family includes 17 species. The largemouth's genus, *Micropterus*, is also known as the "black basses." The genus includes largemouths, smallmouths and spotted bass.
- The largemouth bass is Pennsylvania's biggest sunfish family member.
- The largemouth's species name is *Micropterus salmoides*. "*Salmoides*" refers to trout (*salmo*) because in the southern states, largemouths are sometimes called "trout."
- Largemouth bass were originally distributed in the Ohio River and Lake Erie watersheds in Pennsylvania. Today, they have become established statewide.
- Largemouth bass are sometimes called "bucketmouths," a reference to the fish's gaping jaw. The large mouth lets it swallow big prey.
- Largemouth bass are rounder and less flattened laterally than other sunfish family members. The largemouth's head and back are bright-green to olive-green. Its sides are lighter green. The belly is pale-yellow or whitish.
- The largemouth's upper jaw extends beyond the back edge of its eye. A broad, black stripe or line of broken blotches runs from head to tail. The two sections of the dorsal fin are nearly separated.

For information on bass biology and on the sunfish family, view the Commission's book *Pennsylvania Fishes* online. On the Commission web site main page's left side, click on "Education," and then under the large PLAY logo, click on "PA Fishes Book Online." Navigate to the sunfish family, Chapter 22.

How

Anglers caught 90 largemouths using minnows. This means that about 29 percent of all these bass were taken with a minnow. Chubs accounted for four fish, three were taken with suckers, two with bluegills and one with a brook trout.

Anglers caught 23 bass using worms, and one was taken with a mealworm. Artificial baits accounted for three bass. Plastic worms accounted for 38 largemouths.

Anglers caught 49 largemouths using jigs, but, tallied separately, jig 'n pig specifically took 40 bass. Diving crankbaits took 30 bass, and surface lures accounted for 18. Spinnerbaits accounted for 16 bass, and buzzbaits took six. Spinners took three. These numbers don't total 315 because no bait or lure was specified on some applications.

Big largemouths

The Commission recorded the weights of 280 largemouths from 2000 through 2004. This number differs from the 315 total because C&R Award

rules don't require anglers to record the weight of their fish. So even though some of the C&R Award applications included largemouth bass weights, which were recorded, other C&R applications didn't include this information and those fish weren't counted in the total.

The two biggest largemouth bass caught during the last five years weighed 11 pounds, 8 ounces, caught in Spruce Lake, Pike County, in September 2003; and 10 pounds, 2 ounces, caught in High Point Lake, Somerset County, in August 2001. The current state-record largemouth bass was caught in 1983 by Donald Shade. That fish weighed 11 pounds, 3 ounces. The Spruce Lake bass was apparently bigger, but it was not submitted as a state record (see the sidebar "Award Rules, Application").

During the last five years, four fish weighed between 9 pounds and 10 pounds, six fish weighed between 8 and 9 pounds, 26 fish weighed between 7 and 8 pounds, 96 fish weighed between 6 and 7 pounds, 146 fish weighed between 5 and 6 pounds, and four fish weighed between 4 and 5 pounds. □



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