

FOCUS ON HABITAT

Largemouth Bass

The largemouth bass is the largest member of the sunfish family. Other family members include the smallmouth bass, bluegill, crappie, and pumpkinseed. Largemouth bass have other nicknames such as bucketmouth and bigmouth. They prefer to live in warm water (68 degrees or warmer) and can be found throughout the United States, southern Canada and most of Mexico. In Pennsylvania, largemouth bass may live in our larger rivers, lakes and ponds.

Largemouth bass are game fish. The average size for an adult is 2 to 4 pounds. The Pennsylvania state record is 11 pounds, 4 ounces. Millions of anglers enjoy fishing for this species. But as any wise angler knows, the best way to catch a largemouth is to learn everything you can about its habitat. Habitats are the places in which they live, and they include foods they eat and water conditions they like.

Bass are creatures of cover, or structure. After only a few days from hatching from their eggs, young fish seek hiding places in weeds, floating algae, or brush piles. As they grow, they prefer to live in the same areas. Things like fallen trees and stumps, rock piles, lily pads, and even boat docks make great bass cover. They hide in these areas while waiting to ambush their prey. These places may also provide shade during the hot summer months—a cool place for a predator to hang out!

When largemouth bass are fry (about an inch long), they eat tiny critters called zooplankton. They also eat underwater insects like dragonfly nymphs and diving beetles. Any bugs that fall into the water, like grasshoppers, Japanese beetles, and caterpillars, may be munched on, too. As they get bigger, they still eat many insects, but they also begin eating other small fish.

Once they become adults, they are top predators in the food chain. As the saying goes, “anything they can fit into their large mouths is fair game!” Critters such as fish, crayfish, frogs, snakes, mice, and even small birds have been rumored as providing a meal. In turn, young bass may be eaten by other game fish, herons, ospreys, and snapping turtles.

In a typical farm pond, a food chain may look like this: Phytoplankton are eaten by zooplankton, zooplankton are eaten by aquatic insects, aquatic insects are eaten by bluegills, bluegills are eaten by largemouth bass, and largemouth bass are eaten by people, birds, and snapping turtles.

FOOD CHAIN



Phytoplankton



Zooplankton



Dragonfly



Bluegill



Largemouth Bass



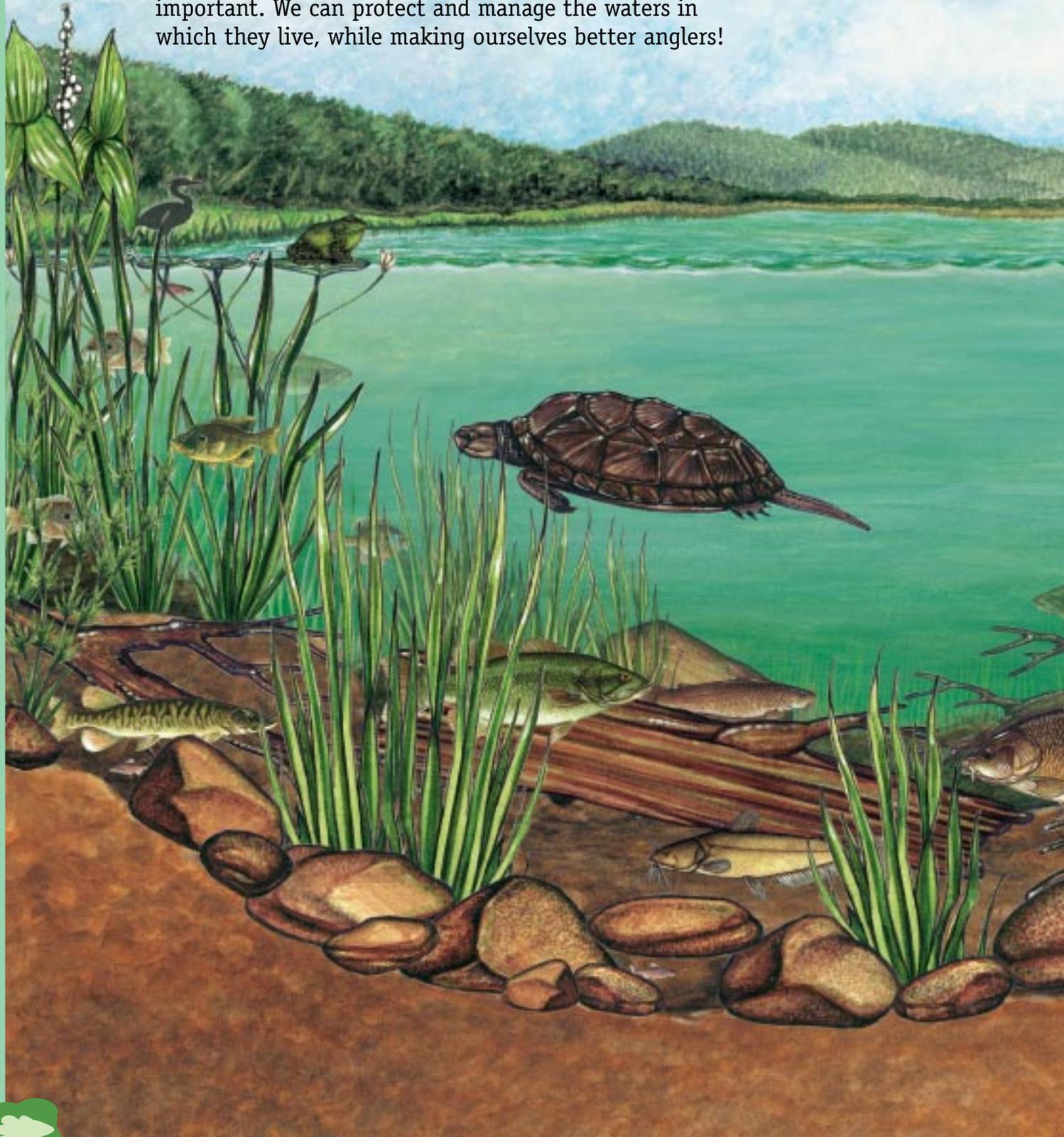
Snapping Turtle

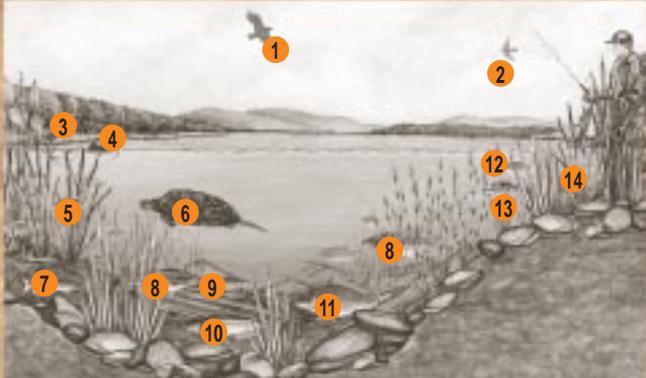


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Learning the habitat of the largemouth bass is important. We can protect and manage the waters in which they live, while making ourselves better anglers!





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|-------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 OSPREY | 8 LARGEMOUTH BASS |
| 2 HAWK | 9 BROWN BULLHEAD CATFISH |
| 3 HERON | 10 YELLOW BULLHEAD CATFISH |
| 4 BULLFROG | 11 CARP |
| 5 GREEN SUNFISH | 12 PUMPKINSEED |
| 6 SNAPPING TURTLE | 13 BLUEGILL |
| 7 PICKEREL | 14 COMMON SHINER |

Tom Wicks '90

