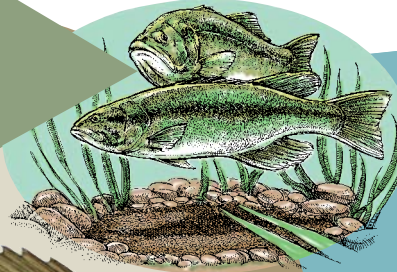


Life of a Sunfish

Preparing the nest



Laying eggs



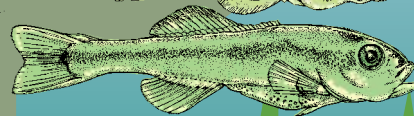
Adult Largemouth Bass



8.4 mm



10.2 mm



15.5 mm

The life cycles of sunfish family members are similar. The only difference may be the habitats they prefer. Members of the sunfish family are nest-builders. All sunfish start life as an egg laid in a nest. The male fish builds the nest and guards the eggs and young fry. Other fish love to eat the eggs and young fry. Male sunfish are aggressive when guarding the nest. The female sunfish lays her eggs in the spring after the water reaches about 70 degrees.

This is a good time to catch the males, but you must release them for the good of the nest. It is the law that no bass can be harvested from mid-April to mid-June. Without males to guard the nest, other fish will eat the eggs and fry.

In water temperatures close to 70 degrees, eggs may take only a few days to hatch. The newly hatched young continue to be nourished by the egg yolks.

In a few days the yolk sac is absorbed and the young fry leave the nest. The fry school and seek the protection of aquatic vegetation. The fry feed on plankton and tiny aquatic insects. In their first year, the fry grow into juveniles and start feeding on small fish. As juveniles, birds, turtles and other larger fish often eat the young sunfish. Although there are about 4,000 eggs laid in each nest, only a small number live to maturity. At three or four years of age, the fish are mature and start the cycle for the next generation.