

Smallmouth Bass in Onondaga Lake



- **Scientific Name:** *Micropterus dolomieu*
- **Habitat:** Lakes, rivers and warm streams, most often deeper than 10 feet in lakes, near submerged cover and gravel or rocky structure.
- **Spawning Time:** Spring, in May to early June.
- **Spawning Locations:** Sandy, gravel or rocky bottom in one to ten feet of water.
- **Age at Maturity:** Smallmouth bass usually reach sexual maturity at ages 3-4, when they are about 7-11 in long.
- **Spawning Behavior:** The male prepares a nest about two to three feet in diameter by sweeping away rocks and sand with its tail. He defends the nest from other males and attracts a series of females into the nest to spawn. After spawning, the female leaves and the male remains to guard the nest and fan the eggs. The male protects the young as they absorb their yolk sac and continues to guard them up to several weeks until they begin to leave the nest.
- **Number of Young Produced:** Females usually produce 5,000-14,000 eggs, depending on their size. The eggs are 1.2-2.5 mm (0.05 to 0.10 inches) in diameter and stick to stones in the bottom of the nest. The number of eggs that survive is highly variable. Sudden changes in temperature or water level can cause the eggs to die from shock or cause the male to abandon the nest, leaving it open for predators.
- **Larval Characteristics:** When they hatch, in 4 to 10 days, the young are about 5.8 mm (0.23 inches) long. They begin feeding on plankton (tiny animals suspended in the water) and switch to larger prey like water insects, and other fish as they grow. Two-year old smallmouth bass are about 5 inches long.
- **Life Span:** May live up to 20 years.
- **Size in Onondaga Lake:** Two to three pound smallmouth bass are readily caught by anglers along the drop-offs and edge of weedbeds in Onondaga Lake. Smallmouth bass up to five pounds have been caught in the lake.