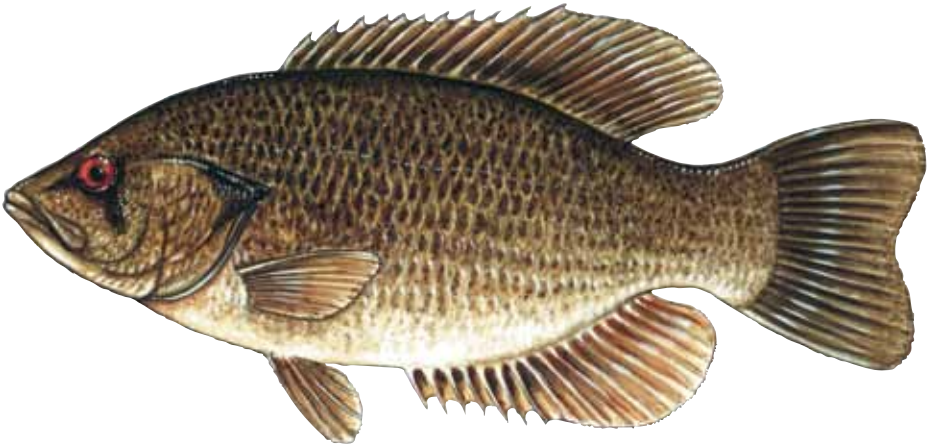


Angling tactics vary from “popping bugs” on the surface, especially for largemouth bass and bluegills, to bottom-bouncing jigs for crappies and smallmouth bass. Aggressive males can often be enticed to strike a bait or lure dragged across or near the nest.

Rock Bass *Ambloplites rupestris*

Species overview: Rock bass are basslike sunfish, sturdy-looking and more camouflage-colored than sunfish. Today they are found throughout Pennsylvania in suitable habitat, but they were originally distributed west of the Appalachian Mountains, in the Ohio River and Great Lakes watersheds. The canal systems of the last century are credited with giving the rock bass an avenue for colonizing Atlantic Ocean watersheds, like the Susquehanna River and Delaware River watersheds. The species name “*rupestris*” means “among the rocks.” The fish’s nicknames include “red-eye” and “goggle-eye.”



Identification: Rock bass are robust fish, not as flattened from the sides as most other sunfish. They are an overall dark-olive to golden-brown, mottled and shading lighter on the sides. The belly is whitish. The scales on the sides have a dark spot at the base. Together these spots form loose, horizontal rows of dots along the fish’s body. The eye is bright-red or orange, and its gill cover has a smudged-looking dark spot at its upper rear corner. The mouth extends past the front edge of the eye. Rock bass can also be distinguished by the five to seven spines on the front edge of the anal fin. They can easily reach a pound or more in weight in Pennsylvania, and a 12-incher is not uncommon.

Habitat: The rock bass is well-named because it is normally found around underwater rocks, stones and boulder rubble. It lives in warmwater lakes, reservoirs and especially in streams and rivers with rocky pools.



Rock bass are often associated with smallmouth bass, and their surprisingly large mouth allows them to take baits, lures and jigs that are fished for smallmouths. In the northern part of its range, rock bass live in cool, clear lakes, frequenting rocky or stone rubble areas.

Life history: Rock bass spawn in spring or early summer, usually May or June, when the water temperature reaches 60 to 70 degrees. The males fan solitary circular nests in bottom sand and gravel. In streams, the nests are located in moderately flowing pools and are usually built near a log or large rock. Female rock bass produce 3,000 to 11,000 eggs, with an average of 5,000. The male guards the nest aggressively and stays with the hatched young until they disperse.

Rock bass are bottom-feeders, well-suited with a big mouth for preying on large aquatic insects, crayfish and small fishes. Adult rock bass move about in schools, and are one of the most common fish of large warmwater streams and rivers.

Redbreast Sunfish *Lepomis auritus*

Species overview: The redbreast sunfish is native to Atlantic Coast watersheds. It is found in southern and eastern Pennsylvania in the Delaware, Susquehanna and Potomac River watersheds. The species name "*auritus*" means "eared," referring to the long, dark gill flap. The common name describes the deep-orange or reddish belly.

Identification: Redbreast sunfish resemble bluegills, but with some important differences. The redbreast's back is blue-green to olive, and there may be indistinct, dark vertical bands against the lighter bluish green on the sides. The lower side and belly shades to yellow and orange. The breast, between the gill opening and the pelvic fin, may be a deep red-orange. The gill flap is very long, with an elongated black spot. The tail is slightly forked, not rounded as in most other sunfish. The mouth is small and the pectoral fins are short and round.

