

Wildlife Express

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Bass

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idfg.idaho.gov

Let's Talk Bass!

In Idaho, we have largemouth and smallmouth bass. Both are members of the sunfish family.

Bass are not native to Idaho; they have not always been found here. Bass are naturally found in the Midwest, southern and eastern parts of the United States. Idaho's smallmouth and largemouth bass grow slower than bass in southern states because our water is colder. It can take four or five years to grow a 12-inch fish and close to ten years to grow a trophy. It is fun to fish for bass, so they were introduced to give anglers fishing opportunities. Idaho may not be their native home, but given the right habitats bass can thrive in Idaho. Let's learn more about these amazing fish.

LARGEMOUTH BASS

The name of this fish tells you a lot about it. They really do have a large mouth! When the mouth is closed, the point where the upper and lower jaw meet will be behind the eye. This is the best identifying feature of largemouth bass. Their bodies are dark green and may have irregular spots on the sides that look a bit like a stripe. The dorsal

fin (fin on the back) has a deep notch in the middle that can make the fin look like it is two separate fins.

Largemouth bass prefer warmer water. Smaller lakes and

reservoirs and larger lakes with shallow bays are good places to look. Here the sun can penetrate the water and warm it up. They also tend to like areas with aquatic plants. Under cover they can ambush prey and take them by surprise.

Fully grown largemouth bass are apex predators; they are at the top of the food chain. Adults eat smaller fish, frogs and crawfish. In southern states, they are known to eat alligator hatchlings! Young largemouth eat zooplankton and aquatic insects. All of their senses are used to detect prey. They use smell, sight, vibration and hearing.

When it comes to nest building and caring for young, the males are in charge!

Largemouth males create the egg nests. They pick a spot over sand, gravel or mud and fan their tails to make a depression. The nests are usually about twice the length of the males. Once the nest is made, the males swim around it to attract females. Males and females swim circles around the nests. The females lay eggs and the males fertilize them. This is called spawning. If you see bass in a spawning dance, it can be easy to tell which fish is the male. Males are usually smaller than the females. Males take good care of the eggs and young bass. They will guard them from predators and fan them to keep them clean from silt. In about a month, young largemouth bass are ready to leave the nest. The male will stop guarding them, but they stay together in a school for protection until they are larger in size. Adult largemouth bass are solitary.

If young largemouth bass can avoid predators, they may live to be 15 to 23 years old, but the average lifespan is about 15 years.



SMALLMOUTH BASS

As you may have figured out by their name, smallmouth bass have a smaller mouth than largemouth bass. When the mouth is closed, the side of the mouth is in front or in line with the eye. Something else that sets them apart from largemouth bass is their eyes are usually a reddish color! Their bodies are olive-green or greenish-brown in color with vertical markings on the sides. The dorsal fin also has a notch, but it is not as deep as the notch found on largemouth bass. A small part of the fin is visible between the two lobes. Smallmouth bass like cooler water than largemouth bass. They may be found along rocky shorelines of larger lakes and lower elevation rivers.

Like largemouth bass, smallmouth bass tend to be the apex predators in their habitats. Adult bass eat fish, crayfish and insects. Young smallmouth bass eat plankton and immature aquatic insects.

Smallmouth males also build nests like largemouth bass, but the spawning dance of smallmouth bass is a bit different. The male and female smallmouth circle the nest and rub against each other. Then they rest on the bottom of the nest for about five seconds. Spawning happens while they are resting at the bottom of the nest. They then circle the nest for 25 to 45 seconds before once again resting on the bottom to spawn. This circling, spawning dance may last for up to two hours! Male smallmouth bass stay and guard the eggs until they hatch in four to ten days. The warmer the water the faster the eggs will develop and the sooner they will hatch. In a few weeks, they will leave the nest and school together until they are a bit bigger. Like largemouth bass, adult smallmouth bass are solitary.

The lifespan of smallmouth bass is a bit shorter than largemouth bass. They may live between six to fourteen years.



WHAT'S A FISH?

Fishes are vertebrates. They have backbones, just like you. Fishes also get oxygen through gills, have fins and live in water. That seems pretty simple, right? Well, in nature, things aren't always as simple as we would like them to be.

Take that backbone for example. We know what our backbone is like, but in the fish world, not all backbones are created equal. Sharks and sturgeon have a backbone made of the same stuff that supports your nose and ears! It is called cartilage. Cartilage is not hard at all!

Fishes need oxygen to survive. Most have a special way to get oxygen out of the water they live in – gills. Water, with oxygen in it, passes over the gills when a fish swims. The skin on the gills is thin. Oxygen can pass through the skin into the fish's bloodstream.

Does this mean that all fishes use gills to get the oxygen they need? No, some fishes actually have lungs! In fact, the African lungfish is so dependent upon breathing air above the water's surface that it will "drown" if kept under water. The Australian lungfish can survive out of water for months if it is in a wet burrow. Lungfishes are examples of fish that break the gill rule.

We usually think of fishes as having fins on each side of their bodies, but what about lampreys? Lampreys look like eels. They don't have paired fins or jaws, and they are still fish. In fact, lampreys represent some of the first freshwater fish to appear on Earth.

So as you can see, defining what a fish is may not be so simple. Fishes have been a part of our planet for 450 million years. There are over 20,000 different kinds worldwide. They have had time to adapt to many underwater (and even out of water) habitats.



Photos: Lamprey
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Lungfish CCBY Gotehal,
Lungfish CCBY Ron Knox on Flickr

Pucker Up!



There are about 20,000 different species of fishes that live on Earth. That's a lot! Every fish is specially adapted to live in its habitat. A fish's mouth can tell you a lot about its habitat, and what it likes to eat.

A sturgeon's mouth is found under its head. The upper lip is longer than the lower lip, and it is rounded down. A sturgeon looks down for its food and this shape helps it suck up its lunch.

Barracuda have a lower jaw that is longer than the upper jaw. Barracuda live in the ocean. They have long, thin mouths with lots of sharp pointy teeth. Barracuda eat other fish that they see swimming above their heads. A small upper jaw lets them see their food clearly.

Have you ever caught a carp or sucker? They look like they are puckered up and ready for a kiss all the time! Their lips are large with rounded edges. Puckered lips are perfect for grabbing small plants and animals, which is just what these fish like to eat.

Some fish look like they have duckbills. Pike are large, predatory fish that love to eat other fish. Have you grabbed a hold of a fish before? It can be difficult to get a good grip with the slime covering a fish. A pike's mouth might look like a duck's bill, but it has something ducks don't have on their bills - teeth! Pike open their big mouths and slam down on the fish. It's not likely a fish will escape the strong hold of a pike.

Bass are gulp feeders. You need a large mouth to gulp food, and bass have a mouth that is huge. A bass will swim up behind a fish, crayfish or other creature, open its mouth, and surround its prey. Bass gulp up not only their prey, but also a big mouthful of water. The water is pushed out of the mouth and flows over the gills.

Let's not forget the Pacific lampreys! Their mouths look like something you might see in a scary movie. Their mouths are round, suction-cup circles surrounded with teeth. In the middle of the circles, there are three large teeth that look like vampire fangs. It is enough to frighten anyone! Pacific lampreys' mouths might make you say "Yew," but it is the perfect design for latching onto a fish and sucking its blood!

Fish sure have some interesting mouths. Next time you catch a fish, look at its mouth and think about how that shape helps it capture its food.



Bass Fishing Fun!



When you think of fishing in Idaho, trout are most likely what pop into your head.

Idaho is known for its trout fisheries. Believe it or not, Idaho also has some great bass fishing across the state. From the Panhandle to the far reaches of the south, bass fishing can be extremely fun. Bass are aggressive, grabbing bait with explosive force. They also will strike at a variety of baits and lures.

Before you venture out to catch bass, you will need a fishing license if you are fourteen years old or older. Also, be sure to check the Idaho Fishing Seasons and Rules booklet for where you plan to fish. Bass rules vary by region, by water and by species. It is your responsibility to know the rules for the water you are fishing. While you are on Idaho Fish and Game's website checking out bass rules <http://idfg.idaho.gov>, look at the Fish Planner, too. The Fish Planner lists all sorts of information about a body of water. It will list the fish found, rules for fishing and the facilities found at the site, like a boat ramp or restroom.



Once you pick your fishing spot, it is time to think about your gear.

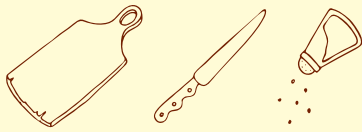
A light to medium action rod with six to ten pound test line will work well. Now think about whether you want to fish for smallmouth or largemouth bass. Plastic tube jigs or crankbaits can catch smallmouth bass. Largemouth bass will strike at a variety



of soft plastic worms and jigs, spinner baits and minnow-imitation lures. Generally speaking, dark colored baits work well in darker water and on cloudy or windy days. Lighter colored baits work well in clearer water and on sunny and calmer days. You should focus casting around shallow shoreline areas, off points, and around rocks, brush or other cover. If you are not having luck in one area, move to a different spot or change the bait or lure. Bass are smart! They learn not to go after a certain lure if they were caught with it in the past.



Good luck and have fun trying to outsmart those bass!



Blackened Bass

Adapted from:
The Everything Wild Game
Cookbook by Karen Eagle

Ingredients:

2 pounds bass fillets
¼ cup plus 1 tablespoon
vegetable oil
1 tablespoon lemon pepper
1 tablespoon paprika
2 teaspoons garlic salt
2 teaspoons dried basil
2 teaspoons dried oregano
2 teaspoons red pepper
2 teaspoons ground black
pepper

Rinse fish fillets and pat dry. Place in a bowl and lightly toss with 1 tablespoon vegetable oil. Set aside. Combine lemon pepper, paprika, garlic salt, basil, oregano, red pepper, and black pepper in a bowl and whisk to blend well. Transfer to a larger, shallow bowl. Add ¼ cup oil to a cast-iron skillet and place over high heat. If you do not have a cast iron skillet then a regular pan will do the trick. Dredge the fish in the spice mixture, lightly coating both sides of the fillet. Sear a batch of several fillets at a time in a hot skillet. Cook for about 1 to 1½ minutes per side. Fillets should be crusty. Continue cooking batches of fillets until done.

Bass Tacos

Adapted from: <http://www.fieldandstream.com>

Ingredients:

6 bass fillets, skinned, cut into 3×1-inch strips
1 egg, separated into yolk and white
1 cup flour
1 teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon black pepper
1 cup water
1 cup crema mexicana
2 teaspoons chipotles in adobo, chopped
4 cup plus 1 tablespoon peanut or vegetable oil
6 oz. fresh chorizo sausage
12 corn tortillas
2 limes
2 cups green or red cabbage, finely shredded
salsa
salt, to taste

Mix the egg yolk, flour, salt, pepper, and water together until you have a pancake-like batter. Refrigerate until ready to use (up to 24 hours). Make the chipotle crema: Combine the crema mexicana with the chipotles including the adobo sauce in a food processor until smooth and pinkish. Heat 1 tablespoon of oil in a skillet over medium heat. Slice the chorizo lengthwise, peel off the casing, and chop. Cook chorizo, using a wooden spoon to break the meat into pinto bean-size pieces, until very crisp (about 5 minutes). Drain and set aside.

In a large pot or deep fryer, heat the oil to 350 degrees. While it's heating, whisk the reserved egg white until stiff and fold it into the batter. When the oil is not quite fully heated, wrap the tortillas in aluminum foil and place in the oven, preheated to 350 degrees, until soft and warm. Dip the bass in the batter, coating the pieces well. Shake off any excess and fry in batches until crisp and golden brown. Drain on paper towels and lightly salt.

To serve, place two or three pieces of fish on a warm tortilla. Squeeze lime juice on them, scatter on a few bits of chorizo, and top with cabbage and dollops of salsa and crema, to taste. Serve immediately.



BE OUTSIDE
IDAHO CHILDREN IN NATURE

Be Outside! Fishing and Exploring

Fishing is a fun outdoor activity to do with friends and family.

It is especially exciting when the fish are biting! When fishing is slow and you just cannot seem to hook a fish, your outdoor experience can still be great! Instead of getting frustrated and ending your outing, take a break. Reel in your line and try something new. Here are some things to do.

- **Bring along a fishing journal.** You can record the time you were fishing, the weather, what you used for tackle, the water conditions and what fish you saw or were lucky enough to catch. Recording your experiences will help you make decisions in the future about when and how to fish.
- **Turn over rocks in the water and see what insects you can find.** This might help you to pick a new bait, lure or fly to try.
- **Take a hike around your fishing area.** What birds and animals do you see? Do you see anything in the environment that has changed? Would this change affect fishing?
- **Have a picnic and something to drink.** It is amazing how different things seem when not distracted by hunger and thirst!
- **Look and listen for wildlife near the water.** Do you see something that might have scared fish into hiding like an osprey?
- **Look at and around the water for insects.** Are there a lot of insects hatching from the water? Sometimes there is so much food, fish just are not hungry for what anglers have to offer.
- **With an adult, pick up litter to keep your angling area pollution free.** Remember to pick up used fishing line. Animals that live around the fishing area can get tangled in used fishing line left on the ground. They can become injured or even die if they cannot get untangled.

**These are just a few things to do when fishing is slow.
Can you think of others?**



Bass Word Search

Largemouth bass like _____ water than smallmouth bass.
 This gender of bass creates the place where spawning occurs.
 Bass are _____ native to Idaho.
 Bass sometimes _____ their prey.
 This bass's mouth extends beyond the eyes.
 Bass are _____ feeders.
 Adult bass are _____.
 This fin on largemouth bass looks like two separate fins.
 _____ bass are usually larger than male bass.
 Bass are members of this family.
 Smallmouth may spawn for two _____.
 Bass fishing is _____!
 Bass can grab bait with _____ force.
 This bass has reddish colored eyes.
 Something young bass might eat.
 Largemouth and smallmouth males _____ their eggs and young.
 This is when female fish lay eggs and male fish fertilize the eggs.
 Largemouth bass tend to like areas with aquatic _____.
 Bass are _____ predators.
 Something adult bass might eat.

Ambush
Apex
Dorsal
Explosive
Female
Fish
Fun
Gulp
Hours
Largemouth
Male
Not
Plants
Protect
Smallmouth
Solitary
Spawn
Sunfish
Warmer
Zooplankton

L A R G E M O U T H S J E F N
 F E M A L E K C Q J M L P I W
 N R E H S T N A L P A F V S P
 T C E T O R P J Y M L S E H U
 M B W M P U N H P S L P V Q X
 G L S X R J R D B A M A I X U
 H N I U I A O S Q Q O W S N Z
 G U L P N R W Y V X U N O F F
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WE WOULD LIKE TO HEAR FROM YOU!
 If you have a letter, poem or question for Wildlife Express, it may be included in a future issue! Send it to:
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