

Redeye Bass (Bartram's Bass) Species Profile



Redeye bass can display individually unique and beautiful colorations. (Photo by Steve Sammons)

South Carolina has two native black bass. Most are familiar with the well-known largemouth bass which is native statewide. The other is the lesser known redeye bass, also referred to as Bartram's bass. It is the only 'shoal loving' black bass native to South Carolina and occupies an important ecological niche in the streams where it is found as a top predator.

The redeye bass is a species of Highest Conservation concern in the South Carolina Wildlife Action Plan. Threats facing this native bass are primarily from introduced species. The redeye will hybridize with smallmouth and spotted bass. The offspring typically have traits of both parents. The unauthorized release of spotted bass (Alabama bass) into the reservoirs of the upper Savannah Basin has led to the spread of that species throughout that system. The impact of this non-native species to redeye bass has been catastrophic in those reservoir habitats. Most recent survey work done by the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources has shown that through hybridization between the two species, redeye bass have been eliminated from Lakes Keowee and Russell and are in sharp decline in Jocassee and Hartwell. Except for isolated tributary streams separated from reservoirs, pure redeye populations may no longer exist.

The continued presence of redeye bass in South Carolina depends on populations in their native Piedmont streams. Movement of spotted and smallmouth bass from one body of water to another presents the greatest current threat to redeye bass. Conserving the current populations and their habitats is critical to the continued existence of this unique native fish. You can help conserve redeye bass and other native species by following the law and never releasing aquatic organisms into waters other than that from which they were caught. Also remember, it is unlawful to release your bait bucket contents unless the bait was collected from the waterbody that you are fishing. Please be responsible when fishing with live bait.

The redeye bass is valued not only as a species of concern, but also because it is an excellent game fish. It is a hard fighting fish and even small individuals are a lot of fun to catch on light tackle. The unique angling opportunities of redeye bass offer an exciting fishing experience in some of South Carolina's most scenic settings. Fly fishing for redeye on the Chattooga River has become popular in the summer months. Wading or paddling any of the beautiful Piedmont streams where this fish is found is a great way to spend time outdoors. Please review the regulations for redeye bass and all game fish before fishing (black bass found on page 29).



Anglers seek redeye bass in the scenic Chauga River in Oconee County.

Quick Stats

Redeye Bass (Bartram's Bass)

Micropterus coosae

- Identification: The eyes are sometimes, but not always red. Slender bronze-olive body that fades into white on the belly, dark distinct lateral blotches or bars along the side typically numbering twelve or less and horizontal rows of spots on the lower side, which can vary from black to pale green in color. Distinguishing white edges along the upper and lower edges of the caudal (tail) fin. The mouth is large and extends to the rear edge of the eye, but not beyond. Teeth are usually present on the tongue. Often has turquoise coloration around the gill and eye.
- Range: Northwestern parts of the state, primarily in the Savannah river basin, it is also present in tributaries of the upper Saluda and Broad river in the Santee basin.
- Habitat: Small to moderate size upland streams in riffles or pools with some flow, some lakes around rocky substrates. Appear to prefer shoal habitats and generally associated with cool water streams
- Average Length and Size: 6-9 inches and 6 oz.-1 lb.
- Food Preferences: Terrestrial insects, crayfish, small fish, salamanders and aquatic insects
- Similar Species: Largemouth, smallmouth and spotted bass.
- Threats: Hybridization with non-native species, primarily spotted bass and smallmouth bass, and the expansion of the range of non-native species in South Carolina. Increase in water temperature and poor water clarity from loss of surrounding vegetation and tree coverage.



Redeye bass collected from the Little River during one of SCDNR's sampling trips.