



Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission
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Rock Bass (*Ambloplites rupestris*) Management and Fishing in Pennsylvania

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Goal: Maintain or enhance Rock Bass sport fisheries through harvest management of naturally sustained Rock Bass populations and through habitat preservation and enhancement. Judiciously stock Rock Bass into compatible new and reclaimed habitats.

Rock Bass occur throughout Pennsylvania and were originally indigenous to the Ohio River and Lake Erie Drainages. The Ohio River Drainage includes the Ohio River, Allegheny River, and Monongahela River Drainages. Rock bass occupy reservoir and lake (lentic) habitats as well as river and stream (lotic) habitats within these drainages, but generally occur at equal or greater densities in rivers and streams compared to lakes and reservoirs. Rock bass stocking by the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission into the Delaware, Susquehanna, and Potomac River Drainages lead to colonization of waters within these drainages, and Rock Bass are now self-sustaining throughout Pennsylvania. The Susquehanna River Drainage includes the West Branch Susquehanna River and Juniata River Drainages. The Delaware River Drainage includes the Lehigh River and Schuylkill River Drainages. Most natural warm-water lakes and man-made reservoirs in Pennsylvania contain self-sustaining Rock Bass populations.

Rock Bass populations are managed for sport fishing through harvest management and through stocking. Stocking typically occurs in conjunction with establishing a self-sustaining Rock Bass population in newly filled, newly acquired reservoirs, or locales where Rock Bass were lost or diminished by a pollution event. For example, abatement of acid mine drainage in on the Cassleman River in Somerset County led to stocking programs in 2003 and 2004 designed to re-establish this species on a self-sustaining basis. Stocking is typically carried out from one, to several years to re-establish the species. Rock Bass populations in Pennsylvania waterways are naturally sustained and do not require annual maintenance stocking. [Annual stocking summary](#) details are listed elsewhere on this website. Additionally, our [Warmwater and Coolwater fishing map](#) provides a broad selection of waters where Rock Bass fishing opportunities can be found in Pennsylvania.

Anglers may be curious as to what size some species can attain in Pennsylvania waters. Pennsylvania's [current state record fish list](#) provides perspective regarding maximum size attainable. Below, we illustrate the growth of Rock Bass in Pennsylvania, and note that a 7-inch Rock Bass is approximately 4 years old (Figure 1) and weighs about 0.2 pounds (Table 1). When Rock Bass are 9 inches in length, they are approximately 5.8 years old and weigh about 0.5 pounds (Table 1). With respect to harvest management, [inland regulations](#)

accommodate harvest of 50 panfish, combined species, which includes Rock Bass. No minimum size limit or seasonal restrictions apply. Rock Bass are generally considered a prolific species, which has led to liberal harvest rules. Despite liberal harvest rules, the average creel size of an angler completing their fishing trip in Pennsylvania who have kept at least one Rock Bass is a little over 3 Rock Bass. Low average harvest reflects an increased practice of catch and release fishing, however in some cases anglers may encounter few Rock Bass of desirable size in the population. Many small Rock Bass may be a result of slow growth, or may reflect angler removal of desirable size Rock Bass such that most of the remaining population is made up of small individuals. If a biologist is faced with angler harvest reducing density of desirable size Rock Bass, harvest restrictions may be applied. [For example, the daily creel limit of Rock Bass was reduced to 10 Rock Bass per day for the Juniata River and its tributaries in 2003.](#)

Apart from inland harvest regulation programs, which have been applied and evaluated to sustain high quality fishing, Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission biologists have also collaborated with biologists in neighboring states to develop harvest regulations that apply to border waters to sustain high quality fishing experiences. These waters include Lake Erie, Pymatuning Reservoir, and Conowingo Reservoir on the lower Susquehanna River. [Border water regulations applying to these locations may differ from inland harvest regulation and can be found elsewhere on this website.](#) Anglers should consult the current Summary of Fishing Laws and Regulations and reference and abide by harvest rules applicable to boundary waters they fish.

[Biologists regularly sample](#) fish populations and measure their density and size structure. Fish habitat is also described by measuring water productivity and aquatic vegetation density. Following such evaluations, management plans are prescribed to enhance density and size structure of Rock Bass within resource limits. We have tabulated average ages and weights for a variety of lengths of Rock Bass in Pennsylvania (Table 1). Anglers find these tables useful in approximating the weight and age of their catch. It should be noted that weight and age based on length can vary between individuals and across populations. Fish length at age depends on a variety of factors including habitat, gender, genetics, forage abundance, and other conditions. In standard biological collections, the decrease in relative or absolute number of Rock Bass at each age can be used to describe their total annual mortality rate. In addition to measuring losses, biologists index annual production of young Rock Bass by measuring catch of juveniles. Growth, recruitment of young to the population, and loss of older Rock Bass are important considerations in developing harvest regulations that produce desirable size Rock Bass for harvest. Habitat enhancement involves careful evaluation of a water body's physical, biological, and chemical characteristics. The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission has an active corps of volunteers that assist in placement of structures after an approved plan has been developed. We encourage organizations interested in volunteering time to contact our [Habitat Unit](#) for more information.

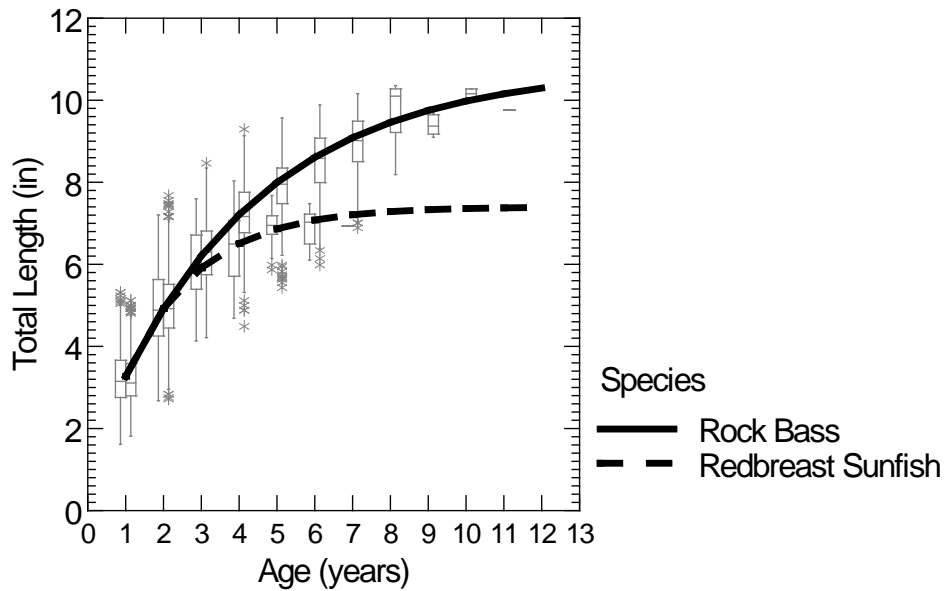


Figure 1. Average length at age of Rock Bass and Redbreast Sunfish (*Lepomis auritus*) collected by Fisheries Biologists in assessment gear in Pennsylvania (July-September)

Tabulating catch and harvest by anglers from various waterways is essential in developing harvest regulations. Information derived from creel surveys frequently yields information of interest to anglers, since seasonal peaks in catch occur for most species. Rock Bass can be caught in most any time of year, generally though, highest catch per hour occurs in spring and early summer in rivers and large reservoirs (Figures 2 and 3). In addition to spring and summer, fall can yield high catch rates in medium size reservoirs (Figure 4). Since Rock Bass defend nests in late spring in association with spawning and brood guarding, adults can be concentrated and quite vulnerable to anglers. With fishing destinations identified from [maps on this site](#) and information describing the best seasons to catch Rock Bass, anglers need only select an effective bait or lure. Most anglers catch Rock Bass drifting a worm or minnow in rocky near-shore habitat. Small jigs, spinners, spoons and crank baits can be effective baits. The abundance of Rock Bass in many waters across the state, particularly in rivers and streams and in near shore zone of reservoirs, makes them an especially popular panfish among youthful anglers.

A [summary of Rock Bass information](#) including fishing tips, species identification, and more can be found elsewhere on this website. Additional information helpful in answering angling questions can be found on the [Fishing FAQs](#) page located elsewhere on this website.

Table 1. Average weight and average age of Rock Bass, at a given length, collected by fisheries biologists in Pennsylvania (March-June).					
Inches	Pounds	Years	Inches	Pounds	Years
4.5	0.1	1.4	11	0.9	> 10.1
5	0.1	1.7	11.5	1.0	> 10.1
5.5	0.1	2.1	12	1.2	> 10.1
6	0.1	2.4	12.5	1.3	> 10.1
6.5	0.1	2.8	13	1.5	> 10.1
7	0.2	3.3	13.5	1.7	> 10.1
7.5	0.2	3.8	14	1.9	> 10.1
8	0.3	4.3	14.5	2.2	> 10.1
8.5	0.4	5.0	15	2.4	> 10.1
9	0.4	5.8	15.5	2.7	> 10.1
9.5	0.5	6.8	16	3.0	> 10.1
10	0.6	8.1	16.5	3.3	> 10.1
10.5	0.8	10.1			

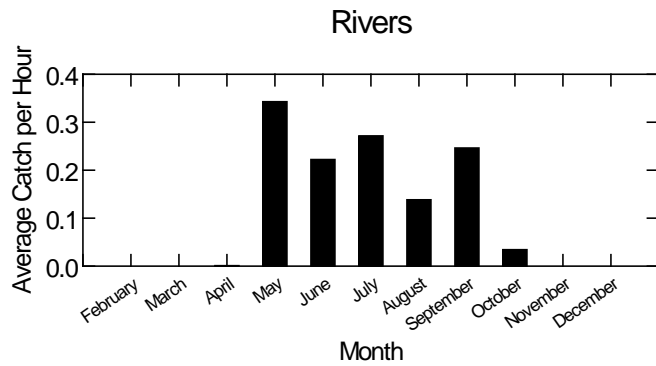


Figure 2. Average catch per angler hour, by month, of Rock Bass from Pennsylvania rivers.

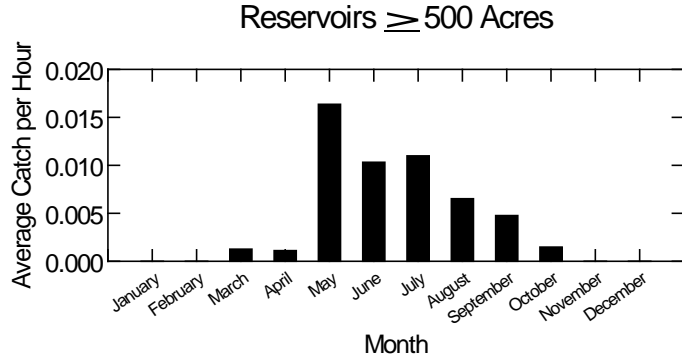


Figure 3. Average catch per angler hour, by month, of Rock Bass from large size Pennsylvania reservoirs.

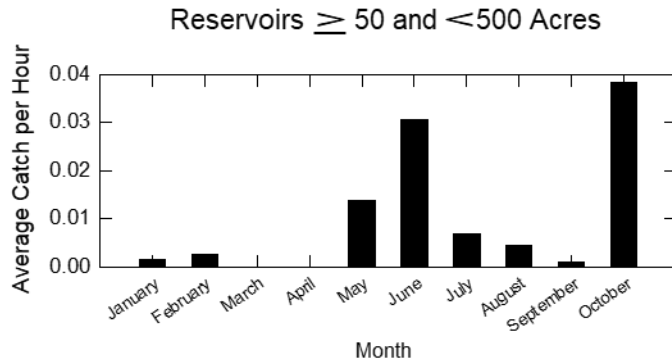


Figure 4. Average catch per angler hour, by month, of Rock Bass from medium size Pennsylvania reservoirs.