



Common Name: DUSKY DARTER

Scientific Name: *Percina sciera* (Swain)

Other Commonly Used Names: none

Previously Used Scientific Names: none

Family: Percidae

Rarity Ranks: G5/S1S2

State Legal Status: Rare

Federal Legal Status: none

Description: A slender darter growing to a maximum total length of about 130 mm (5.1 in), the dusky darter typically is tan or gray in color, with 8-12 dark oval blotches along the sides, dorsolateral reticulations above the lateral blotches, and 7-9 vague to dark saddles on the dorsum. A fleshy bridge of tissue (i.e., a frenum) connects the snout to the upper lip. The gill membranes are moderately connected. A suborbital bar is sometimes present. The fins are speckled (or darkened in breeding males) and three spots form a vertical row at the base of the caudal fin, although the lower two spots often blend together. The dusky darter lacks bright breeding coloration.

Similar Species: The dusky darter is not similar to any potentially co-occurring members of the genus *Percina* in the Chickamauga Creek (logperch *Percina caprodes*, snail darter *Percina tanasi*) or Toccoa River systems (gilt darter *Percina evides*, olive darter *Percina squamata*, tangerine darter *Percina aurantiaca*) systems.

Habitat: This widespread species occurs in moderate to low gradient streams and rivers. In Georgia, it is usually collected from larger streams, such as Tiger Creek, Lookout Creek, and Little Chickamauga Creek. It is typically associated with moderate current velocities in habitats ranging from rocky riffles to sand-bottomed areas with abundant woody debris.

Diet: Aquatic insect larvae, including caddisflies, black flies, midges, and mayflies.

Life History: The breeding season occurs from late spring to early summer. Dusky darters

probably spawn their adhesive eggs over gravel and sand substrata. Both sexes reach sexual maturity at age 1; maximum life span is about 3 years for females and 4 years for males.

Survey Recommendations: This species is vulnerable to backpack electrofishing and seining.

Range: The dusky darter is found in Gulf Coast drainages from Texas to west Alabama, including the Mississippi River basin northward to Indiana and Ohio. In Georgia, the dusky darter has been found in the Chickamauga Creek, Lookout Creek and Toccoa River systems. Toccoa specimens are only known from Star Creek and from the Ocoee River within Tennessee. Check the [Fishes of Georgia Webpage](#) for a watershed-level distribution map.

Threats: The dusky darter, although abundant in parts of its range, has a limited distribution in Georgia. The Georgia localities for this small, versatile darter represent populations along the Tennessee River system that have been isolated from other populations by impoundments. The principal threat to the dusky darter in Georgia is stream degradation resulting from failure to employ Best Management Practices (BMPs) for forestry and agriculture, failure to control soil erosion from construction sites and bridge crossings, and increased stormwater runoff from developing urban and industrial areas.

Georgia Conservation Status: Although its overall range in the state is small, the dusky darter is widely distributed within the Chickamauga Creek system in northwest Georgia. Recent (i.e. early to mid 2000s) records indicate persistence within several creek systems. The dusky darter is only known from one tributary stream in the Georgia portion of the Toccoa River system, where its current status is unknown.

Conservation and Management Recommendations: Conserving aquatic species restricted to Tennessee River tributaries, including the dusky darter, depends on protecting stream habitat quality in these streams by eliminating sediment runoff from land disturbing activities such as roadway and housing construction, maintaining and restoring forested buffers along stream banks, eliminating inputs of contaminants such as fertilizers and pesticides, and maintaining natural streamflow patterns. Special efforts must be taken to minimize contaminant, sediment, and stormwater runoff from urban and residential developments if stream habitat and sensitive aquatic species are to be protected.

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Date Compiled or Updated:

B. Freeman, 1999: original account

K. Owers, 2009: added picture, updated status and ranks, added fish atlas link, converted to new format, minor edits to text

B. Albanese, Dec 2009: added similar species, conservation status, and general edits.

Z. Abouhamdan, April 2016: updated link