



Common Name: BLACK DARTER

Scientific Name: *Etheostoma duryi* Henshall

Other Commonly Used Names: none

Previously Used Scientific Names: none

Family: Percidae

Rarity Ranks: G4/S1

State Legal Status: Rare

Federal Legal Status: none

Description: The black darter grows to a maximum length of 70 mm (2.8 in), with a blunt snout typical of the "snubnose darter" group. Eight to nine dark saddles cross the tan dorsum and about 9 dark blotches form a midlateral stripe; the fourth dorsal saddle is often the darkest and may extend ventrally to the midlateral stripe. The venter is pale yellow. A small orange spot occurs at the front of the first dorsal fin, and a black teardrop descends below the eye. Males are slightly larger than females. Breeding males have a green throat and chin, an orange breast and belly, and brick red pigmentation in the dorsal fins.

Similar Species: The black darter is very similar to the snubnose darter (*Etheostoma simoterum*). The snubnose darter has a narrow but distinct frenum (vs. no frenum), two separate spots in the middle of the caudal fin of juveniles (vs. a single median caudal spot or median caudal spots fused together in juveniles), and a more steeply sloping (i.e., blunt) snout.

Habitat: The black darter inhabits small creeks and rivers, living in pools and slowly moving riffles with gravel, cobble, boulder or bedrock substrata.

Diet: Benthic aquatic insects.

Life History: Spawning occurs from March to early May. The aggressive males may chase one another and follow females as they search for a site to attach their eggs. The accompanying male embraces the female in an S-shaped position to fertilize the eggs as the female lays them one by one on the surfaces of rocks. Sexual maturity is reached at age one and the maximum life span is likely three years.

Survey Recommendations: This species is vulnerable to standard sampling methods such as seining and backpack electrofishing. Nuptial males should be photographed with their fins erect, which can facilitate accurate identification.

Range: The black darter is found only in the Tennessee River drainage in Alabama, Tennessee, Georgia, and extreme northeast Mississippi. In Georgia, this species is restricted to the Chickamauga Creek watershed in the northwest corner of the state. Check the [Fishes of Georgia Webpage](#) for a watershed-level distribution map.

Threats: Habitat degradation in small streams, including accelerated erosion and sedimentation caused by land-disturbing activities, poses the greatest threat to the black darter.

Georgia Conservation Status: The black darter is only represented by a handful of occurrences in the Chickamauga Creek watershed. However, it has been collected in the early 2000s in both the Chickamauga and Lookout Creek systems.

Conservation and Management Recommendations: Conserving populations of the black darter depends on maintaining and improving habitat quality in small 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 patterns of stream flow. Watershed clearing and urban development can lead to unnaturally flashy stormwater runoff, which scours stream channels and results in lower baseflows.

Selected References:

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Mettee, M. F., P. E. O'Neil, and J. M. Pierson. 1996. Fishes of Alabama and the Mobile Basin. Oxmoor House, Birmingham. 820pp.

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Author of Account: Byron J. Freeman

Date Compiled or Updated:

B. Freeman, 1999: original account

K. Owers, Jan 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 minor edits.

Z. Abouhamdan, April 2016: updated link