Common Name: TALLAPOOSA DARTER

Scientific Name: *Etheostoma tallapoosae* Suttkus and Etnier

Other Commonly Used Names: Before its official description in 1991, it had been referred to in various literature as the Tallapoosa snubnose darter and the upland darter.

Previously Used Scientific Names: *Etheostoma* (*Ulocentra*) sp.

Family: Percidae

Rarity Ranks: G4/S2S3

State Legal Status: Rare

Federal Legal Status: none

Description: This is a moderately-sized species of "snubnose" darter with the characteristic blunt snout. Reaching about 70 mm (2.8 in) total length, the Tallapoosa darter usually has 8-9 chocolate-brown lateral blotches and eight dorsal saddles. Breeding males develop red-orange coloration ventrally and between the lateral blotches and a blue-green anal fin and breast; the dorsal fins have broad red-brown basal bands and are edged by a blue band. Recent studies have detected genetic differences between populations in the Tallapoosa and Little Tallapoosa River systems, but these populations are not known to differ morphologically.

Similar Species: Unlike the more widespread Coosa darter, the Tallapoosa darter has no red window present in the first (spinous) dorsal fin. These species are not known to co-occur.

Habitat: This species is found primarily in relatively silt-free riffles around gravel, cobble and boulder substrata in stream sizes ranging from creeks to small rivers.

Diet: Benthic aquatic insects.

Life History: Like other snubnose dartes, the Tallapoosa darter is an egg-attacher. One or two eggs at a time are attached to the surfaces of rocks, logs, or vegetation. Males are aggressive, but are not territorial. Spawning probably occurs during March and April, although males will obtain spawning coloration earlier in the year.

Survey Recommendations: The Tallapoosa darter is very vulnerable to seines, and can be easily captured where they occur.

Range: The Tallapoosa darter is endemic to the Tallapoosa River system in Alabama and Georgia and occurs only above the Fall Line. Georgia populations are known from the Tallapoosa River, Little Tallapoosa River, and their tributaries. The Tallapoosa darter appears more widespread in the Tallapoosa system than the Little Tallapoosa system. Tallapoosa darters occur both in small tributary streams and in the main channels of the Tallapoosa and Little Tallapoosa rivers. Check the Fishes of Georgia Webpage for a watershed-level distribution map.

Threats: The Tallapoosa darter is particularly vulnerable to habitat loss because its distribution is restricted to a single river system. Populations in the Little Tallapoosa River system are isolated from downstream populations by Harris Reservoir in Alabama and are not as widespread as those in the main Tallapoosa River. Populations in both systems are threatened by accelerated stream degradation by excessive inputs of silt and sediment. Stream degradation is the result of 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: A recent status survey found no evidence for decline between 1990 and 2002 and indicated that the Tallapoosa darter remains widespread throughout the upper Tallapoosa River system. However, the same study found that this species is less likely to occur in streams that are upstream from impoundments and in watersheds with relatively high impervious cover.

Conservation and Management Recommendations: Conserving species unique to the Tallapoosa River system, such as the Tallapoosa darter, depends on maintaining and improving flowing-water habitats and water quality in the river and its tributaries. Because of genetic structuring, it is important to protect populations in both the Tallapoosa and Little Tallapoosa River systems. It is essential to eliminate sediment runoff from land-disturbing activities (such as roadway and housing construction) and inputs of contaminants (such as fertilizers and pesticides). Forested buffers should be maintained along the banks of the river and the smaller tributary streams that feed the river. Maintaining natural patterns of streamflow by preventing excessive water withdrawal or unnaturally flashy runoff (such as from urban storm water runoff) is also an essential element of protecting riverine habitat quality in the free-flowing and unregulated portions of the Tallapoosa River system. Impounding streams should be a last resort for developing water supplies.

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Date Compiled or Updated:
B. Freeman-Original Account: 1999
K. Owers-Updates: January 27th, 2009 Added picture, updated status and ranks, added fish atlas link, converted to new format, minor edits to text
G. Dinkins, Aug 2009: general update of account
B. Albanese, Sep, 2009: incorporated additional references (spawning, species at risk report, and genetics).
Z. Abouhamdan, April 2016: updated link