



# Profiling the Northern

By DAVID HUNTER JONES

## Finding and catching

this member of the black bass family may be the easiest leg of your race to a BASS Slam

**IT IS FAIRLY** safe to say that most anglers can thank the Northern strain of largemouth bass for introducing them to the addictive nature of bass fishing. This species is the most widely distributed member of the largemouth family, and therefore was probably many anglers' first experience with hooking, fighting and landing a bass. For this reason, it is appropriate to start the BASS Slam profile series with the Yankee member of the largemouth family. If you have yet to be formally introduced to a Northern largemouth (lipping one boatside), the following information will come in quite handy. If you have had experience with this bass, read on to find out how to qualify your catch in order to complete a BASS Slam.

## **MICROPTERUS SALMOIDES SALMOIDES**

The Northern largemouth is a best friend of bass anglers because it can be caught year-round in almost every reservoir, lake, ditch or pond across 49 states. The only place you won't find a Northern largemouth is in central and southern Florida, where pure Florida-strain largemouth bass are still king. Any largemouth that you catch north of a line from Jacksonville, Fla., to Tarpon Springs, Fla., would be considered a Northern largemouth, for all practical purposes.

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According to BASS Conservation Director Chris Horton, the fish are typically in the best condition two times a year: just prior to the spawn, which varies across the country, and in fall as they gorge on shad and other prey in preparation for winter. Horton goes on to say your best bets for a whopper are in productive systems: water that has an abundance of forage, is very nutrient rich and has a long growing season (warmwater periods).

### WHAT TO EXPECT

The minimum length requirement for a BASS Slam Northern largemouth is 14 inches, which is easily attainable. The average size of an adult runs between 12 and 20 inches, with common weights between 1 and 5 pounds, though larger representatives are not uncommon. Submitting an above-average Northern will go a long way in the BASS Slam of the Year hunt, as there is not as much disparity among the other seven species. Gene Gilliland with the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation says Northern largemouth are the most aggressive of the black bass, meaning they're easily caught. They have even been described as "dumb" thanks to their willingness to strike almost any bait.

### RECORD

While it is hard to define a pure Northern largemouth world record (most trophy-size largemouth are either Florida strain or Florida/Northern hybrid), Walter Bolonis hooked a 15-pound, 8-ounce pure Northern in Massachusetts in 1975 that still stands as the state record.

### WHAT SETS IT APART?

General characteristics of Northern strain largemouth bass include a larger mouth than other black bass; a dark, broad band running the length of the fish that becomes broken up as the fish matures; an overall olive green coloration that lightens toward the bottom of the fish; and irregular dark spots on the lower half. Northern largemouth bass are virtually impossible to distinguish from Florida largemouth based on outward appearances. Northern largemouth tend to have lighter blotches on their dorsal sides. Anatomically they are the same. The only sure way to distinguish between the two is by genetic analysis. Both the Northern largemouth bass and Florida largemouth bass can be distinguished from other bass by their larger lower jaw, which extends well past the eye. Although they run smaller than their Florida counterparts, finding one to fill the minimum size requirement should not be difficult.



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