



The Alabama Bass, *Micropterus henshalli* (Teleostei: Centrarchidae), from the Mobile River basin

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Abstract

The Alabama Bass, *Micropterus henshalli*, was diagnosed as a subspecies of *Micropterus punctulatus* from the Mobile River basin, Alabama, Georgia, and Mississippi, USA, by Hubbs and Bailey (1940). The species has been introduced in the Chattahoochee River, as has the Spotted Bass, *Micropterus punctulatus*. *Micropterus henshalli* differs from *M. punctulatus*, with which it has been aligned, by having higher scales counts, a narrower head, smaller scale width, higher gill raker count, and a smaller tooth patch. It also has a narrower and more elongate body shape than does *M. punctulatus*. The Alabama Bass is relatively common in streams and rivers throughout the Mobile River basin.

Key words: Alabama, Spotted Bass, black bass, Alabama River

Introduction

Anglers, game and fish agencies, and biologists have long recognized the distinctiveness of the Alabama Bass, although a thorough systemic analysis of this form was lacking. The form was first diagnosed as a subspecies of the Spotted Bass, *Micropterus punctulatus*, by Hubbs and Bailey (1940), who recognized it as having smaller scales and a more elongate body. They proposed that fish from the Escambia, Pascagoula, and Pearl rivers were intergrades with *M. punctulatus punctulatus*, but they had few specimens available for analysis. Gilbert (1973) examined specimens of Spotted Bass from the southeast and considered specimens from the lower Mobile Basin, below the Fall Line, to be intergrades between *M. p. punctulatus* and *M. p. henshalli*. Unfortunately, recent genetic analysis has not included Spotted Bass from the Mobile Basin (Near et al. 2003, Near et al. 2004). A study by Kassler et al. (2002) did include 10 specimens of 'Alabama spotted bass' from Jordan Lake, a reservoir on the Coosa River in Alabama, in their analysis of black bass species status using both morphological and genetic techniques. In their consensus tree 'Alabama spotted bass' was proposed as the sister taxon to *Micropterus coosae*. A cladistic analysis of *Micropterus* using morphometric characters indicated that *M. p. henshalli* grouped with *Micropterus salmoides* rather than with *M. punctulatus punctulatus*, suggesting distinctiveness of the form (Harbaugh 1994). Our objective is to provide morphological data to support the elevation of the Alabama Bass to species status.

Material and methods

This study is based on meristic and mensural data on specimens from the Mobile Basin and surrounding drainages. The majority of specimens examined were collected via hook and line from 1996–2008; all of these