



## Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

## Tessellated Darter *Etheostoma olmstedii*

State Status: **None**  
Federal Status: **None**

**SPECIES DESCRIPTION:** The Tessellated Darter has a continuous lateral line along the mid-body that does not arch upward, and also has a single anal spine. Non-breeding specimens are sandy-tan with several dark saddle-like marks and 9 to 10 dusky, lateral spots that often suggest the letters x, y, or z. Males usually have a dark blotch on the membrane between the first and second dorsal spines, and when breeding, become quite black and develop swollen white tips on the pelvic fins. Adults are usually 2 to 3 inches long, occasionally reaching 4 inches. This fish often sits motionless, propped up on its pelvic fins, on the bottom or on rocks, then makes abrupt, quick darts when feeding or disturbed. The species is short-lived, and most individuals die after their third summer, although a few survive into their fourth winter. Tessellated Darters feed mainly on the larvae of midges and other flies; however, they may switch to other food, such as caddisflies, later in the season.

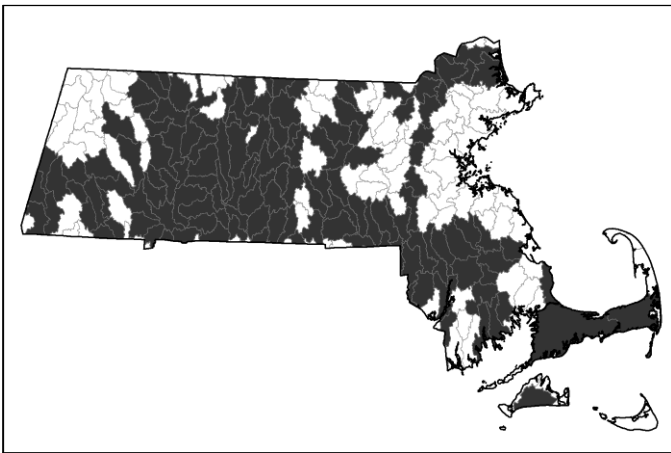
only a few specimens have been found in the Merrimack River Drainage. This darter is absent from the Hoosic, upper Deerfield, Charles, and Nantucket drainages.

**HABITAT DESCRIPTION:** The Tessellated Darter prefers moving water and, unlike the Swamp Darter, is seldom found in lakes or ponds. It frequents areas with rubble, sand, or mud bottoms that usually have some vegetation. Underwater objects, usually rocks or logs, are required for spawning.

**THREATS:** Pollution or other alterations to its habitats appear to be the major threats to this species.

### REFERENCE:

This species description was adapted, with permission, from: Karsten E. Hartel, David B. Halliwell, and Alan E. Launer. 2002. *Inland Fishes of Massachusetts*. Massachusetts Audubon Society, Lincoln, Massachusetts.



Data from DFW Fisheries Surveys and Harvard Museum of Comparative Zoology

**DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE:** In Massachusetts, this darter is common in most of the Connecticut and Blackstone river basins, in the southeastern parts of the state, and on Martha's Vineyard. It is rare in the northeast drainages, where

Updated 2015

*A Species of Greatest Conservation Need in the Massachusetts State Wildlife Action Plan*

**Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife**

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