

## FEBRUARY 15 - 29, 2020 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

By Dick Harlow

### LARGEMOUTH BASS



**Largemouth Bass**, *Micropterus salmoides*,  
© wildkratts.fandom.com

The **Largemouth Bass**, *Micropterus salmoides*, is considered a Keystone Species. It is carnivorous, native to the eastern and central United States. Because it is a major predator in lakes, ponds and rivers, it controls a top-down influence on the food web of the body of water in which it lives.

Recalling the definition of a Keystone Species: it is a species which can be a dominant predator, but when removed from the ecosystem (the habitat) in which it is living, it will allow the prey of that predator to expand or over-populate. This increase in prey population will cause a decrease in the diversity of organisms in the specific ecosystem, (i.e. the pond, lake or river).

There are various types of keystone species as mentioned in the previous nature notes. One of those species is the North American Beaver who alters the habitat significantly and in turn affects a large number of other wildlife species.

As a master predator we humans when we hunt do not necessarily take down the weak and infirm like other predators.



**Largemouth Bass**, waiting patiently for a meal.  
© fieldandstream.com.jpeg

Largemouth Bass as a major predator in a pond, lake or river, will hunt for fish and unsuspecting prey. We need to understand the benefit that bass provide to the pond, lake or river in which they live.

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**Largemouth Bass** feeding on a Leopard Frog.  
© fishesofboneyardcreek.weebly.com

There are many attributing factors for man's success as well as wildlife successes within the environment, (e.g. the creation of our National Park System for both humans and wildlife). As mentioned in past notes if we lose keystone species, the environment we see today will change, and some say the planet will unravel.

### SEASTAR



**Seastar**, *Pisaster ochraceus*, © Peter J. Bryant

Living next to saltwater for a good part of my life I enjoyed digging for clams, whether it was on the coast of Buzzards' Bay in Massachusetts clamming for Quahogs or for oysters, or in the mud flats of Maine clamming for Soft-shell clams. For a long time, I looked upon starfish/seastars as the enemy. It didn't matter that clams dig their way deep into the mud or sand and that starfish/seastars go after mussels and snails rather than the clams I sought. Yes, I am a naturalist and I understand that all organisms need food. But every human tries his/her best to protect a likely food source. It has taken me time to understand and appreciate that starfish/seastars are important in the ecosystem. However, they are not necessarily the center stone that is represented in the top of the stone arch that keeps the ecosystem together of which they are a part. They simply are a major part that helps keep the interactions of the ecosystem together. I suppose there are some who will never understand Keystone Species, but Seastars have a definite function where they belong within the ecosystem.

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**Seastar**, *Pisaster ochraceus*,  
© Eugene Kalenkovich

Seastars occur in many different colors, more notably in the Pacific Ocean than in the Atlantic. Seastars used to be called starfish, and I know many people today still call them starfish. But, long held terms are tough to relinquish and to learn other terms or names. The basic fact is that starfish are not and never have been a fish, thus the technically incorrect name of starfish.

If they didn't keep mussels and snails in check, then the bivalves and gastropods they prey upon would certainly diminish the diversity of the shore!

If any of you want to check out the tracks that you might see in the snow at EastView here is some help. We have all three: fox, dog and coyote here at EastView. However, dogs are supposed to be on a leash, therefore the tracks you see in the field, backyard or away from your cottage need to be looked at as a possible fox or coyote.

### FOX, DOG, COYOTE TRACKS IN SNOW



**Red Fox** tracks with a **Dog** track and a **Coyote** track for comparison. Note the bar shaped heel pad in the fox's front track (upper left), the streamlined coyote track and the splayed dog track with outer toes pointing outward. This is typical of dog tracks, but some dog tracks do look very much like coyote tracks. © ouroneacrefarm.com.

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**OBSERVATIONS**

MAMMALS

Fox tracks in snow  
Coyote tracks in snow

**Weather Tidbits**

**Month of FEBRUARY 1-29, 2020**

*All Measurements taken at solar noon (1230 EST).*

**PRECIPITATION**

**Total Precipitation: 46.2 mm or 1.8 inches, 50% less than average. 3.6 inches is average for Middlebury in February.**

**Overcast Days: 8**