



Watercress Darter (*Etheostoma nuchale*)

The watercress darter is a small endangered fish found in only a few springs in Jefferson County.* Water from these springs flow to the Black Warrior River.* One spring is protected by the Watercress National Wildlife Refuge.

The watercress darter has dark bars that resemble individual saddles on the back of a horse. On top of the saddle is a white stripe that stretches from the head to where the dorsal spine starts.* A breeding male may have a reddish orange color on the bottom between the pelvic and anal fins.* Six bluish brown vertical bars are present on the caudal peduncle.* These bars are divided by orange bars. The anal fin of a breeding male is bright blue, and four colors are on both dorsal fins. A watercress darter is small, shorter than a finger, about 1 to 1-3/4 inches in length.

The watercress darter lives among thick mats of plants, like watercress, from which the fish is named. A watercress darter eats insect larvae and prefers cool water temperatures.* Urban runoff threatens this fish. Fish and wildlife belong to all of us, and we rely on state and federal agencies to protect them.

Vocabulary

Anal fin – a single fin on the bottom of a fish behind the anus.

Dorsal – top.

Endangered – an animal or plant in danger of extinction within the foreseeable future.

Caudal fin – the tail fin on a fish, used to make the fish go forward.

Caudal peduncle – the narrow muscular portion of the fish body in front of the caudal fin.

Larvae – an immature insect of a species that changes (undergoes metamorphosis) into adult; larvae and adults look very different (caterpillars are larvae and butterflies are adults).

Pelvic fins – a pair of side fins on the bottom of a fish.

Spines – the hard sharp portion of a fin.

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The drawing is original artwork by Julie Harris Mitchell. The photograph and some of the information are from *Fishes of Alabama and the Mobile Basin*.