



## Vermilion Darter (*Etheostoma chermocki*)

The vermilion darter is a fish that is only found in Turkey Creek in Jefferson County, Alabama. This creek is in the Alabama Ridge and Valley region.\*

The vermilion darter hides in rocky areas that have swift water. Darters have large pectoral fins.\* Unlike most fish, darters do not have swim bladders.\* These characteristics help darters stay on the bottom of streams.

Many types of darters are colorful. A breeding male vermilion darter has a light olive to straw-colored body with dark olive back saddles.\* Brick red spots and olive green blotches occur on its sides. Its common name comes from the vermilion lower sides, bottom and tail region. The dorsal fin has cherry-red areas.\*

This unique, 2-inch Alabama fish lives in an industrialized area of Alabama.\* The habitat where it lives is changing, and scientists are concerned. Dirt and sand wash into Turkey Creek and cover up the rocky areas where vermilion darters live and feed. As Alabama's human population grows, the resulting changes in our natural environment affect the overall quality of life for the vermilion darter, other wildlife, and humans.

### \*Vocabulary

Alabama Ridge and Valley (or Alabama Valley and Ridge) – a central and eastern Alabama region of folded sedimentary rock, which forms parallel valleys; one of five geological regions in Alabama.

Breeding – ready to reproduce.

Dorsal fin – top fin that is in two sections on a darter, the spiny dorsal is in front and a soft dorsal fin is behind the spiny dorsal fin.

Industrialized – has many businesses that make things from raw materials like steel.

Pectoral fins – a pair of side fins behind the head.

Swim bladder – an organ found in many bony fish that is filled with gas; it is used for buoyancy.

[www.OutdoorAlabama.com](http://www.OutdoorAlabama.com)

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*.