



## **Warrior Darter** (*Etheostoma bellator*)

The Warrior darter is a small fish that is endemic to and named for the upper Black Warrior River system.\* It is found in small to medium streams that are part of the Cumberland Plateau province.\* The Warrior darter is most similar to the vermilion darter, which only lives in the Alabama Ridge and Valley province.\*

The Warrior darter has a narrow orange stripe along its lower side; in the vermilion darter, this stripe is broad and vermilion or red. A breeding male Warrior darter is colored brightly with the color of turquoise on the head, the pectoral fin, and the breast.\* Turquoise color is present on the dorsal area, pelvic fins, anal fin and margins of the caudal fins.\* Both dorsal fins have red in them.\* An adult Warrior darter is small, 1 to 2-1/2 inches in length, shorter than a finger.

The Warrior darter eats insect larvae and inhabits rubble pools and riffle areas having sandstone or shale bottoms.\* Warrior darters and other Alabama aquatic animals live in habitats that are diverse and healthy.\* Actions that are good for Alabama fish and wildlife are also good for the people of Alabama.

### **\*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.

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

Breeding – ready to reproduce.

Caudal fin – the tail fin on a fish that is used for propulsion.

Cumberland Plateau – the second largest geological region in Alabama, the Cumberland Plateau has lots of sandstone and shale, so there is not much ground water and small streams may go dry.

Diverse habitats – in a stream, diverse habitats include a variety of substrate, water speeds and depths.

Dorsal fin – the fin or fins on top of a fish.

Endemic – only found in a certain area.

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).

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

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

Riffle – areas of faster, shallow water in streams.

Sandstone – rock composed mainly of sand-sized minerals or rock grains.

Shale – a type of rock formed from hardened clay.