



## Rivanna Reservoir 2023



Located in Albemarle County, the Rivanna Reservoir is a 450-acre water supply impoundment owned and managed by the Rivanna Water and Sewer Authority. The reservoir contains self-sustaining populations of Largemouth Bass, Bluegill, Redear Sunfish, Black Crappie, and Channel Catfish. The lake has traditionally provided excellent Largemouth Bass and panfish fisheries. In the spring of 2022, the fish community of the Rivanna Reservoir was sampled by boat electrofishing. This report summarizes the results of these surveys and what anglers can expect to catch in the Rivanna Reservoir.

The reservoir's fish community is very diverse with ten fish species collected in the 2022 surveys (Table 1). Gizzard Shad and Largemouth Bass were by far the most abundant species collected in the electrofishing survey (Table 1). Rivanna Reservoir continues to provide an exceptional Largemouth Bass fishery for central Virginia. Bass catch rates were good for a larger reservoir and were similar to rates from previous surveys. The bass population contains good portions of juvenile and adult fish (Figure 1), with exceptional numbers of bass in the 10 to 21 inch range. The reservoir has good trophy potential for Largemouth Bass due to the diversity and abundance of forage and limited fishing pressure. This potential was evident by our collection of six bass measuring over 20 inches. The largest bass collected in the 2022 survey measured nearly 23 inches and weighed approximately 7.5 pounds. The most productive areas for bass were the upper end of the reservoir around the flats, points, and woody structure and in the lower end of the lake (below the Rt. 743 Bridge) around the emergent water willow.

Bluegill and Redear Sunfish catch rates were low (Table 1), with the Bluegill catch rates considerably lower than previous surveys (>100 fish/hour in previous surveys). The lower catch is likely due to extreme sampling variability and not a drop in the population because the catch has been stable in all other previous surveys. Catch rates for Bluegill will be monitored closely in future surveys to make sure the drop was due to this sampling variability. The bulk of Bluegill and Redear collected were small (< 8 inches); only a few Bluegill and Redear Sunfish over 8 inches were collected (Figure 2). The 2022 survey, along with previous electrofishing surveys and angler reports, indicate that there are some large Bluegill and Redear (up to 12 inches) in the upper end of the reservoir, especially during the spring (April-May). Anglers determined to catch quality sunfish should concentrate their efforts on big Redear during the spring and early summer. The best place to fish for the big Redear is in the upper lake around the sandy flats that these fish frequent during spawning.

Electrofishing catch rates for crappie were high with all of the crappie catch composed of Black Crappie. Although catch rates were high, the majority of crappie collected were less than the preferred angler size of 10 inches (Figure 2). The lack of preferred-sized fish is not due to low survival (previous surveys indicate annual survival near 85%) with crappie up to age-16 collected in previous samples (Figure 3). The lack of larger crappie is due to overpopulation and stunting. On average, crappie growth slows at age-5 when the fish approach 9 inches, and crappie rarely grow in excess of 10 inches (Figure 3). The crappie population is in need of considerable angler harvest of fish in the 7-9 inch range to increase average growth. Crappie up to 18 inches were collected in previous surveys, but these larger fish are very rare, and anglers should expect to primarily catch fish in the 7 to 9 inch range.

Anglers looking for an excellent bass lake that is in the Charlottesville area should visit the Rivanna Reservoir. The lake offers good numbers of catfish and smaller panfish for anglers to enjoy. One problem is that the access to the reservoir is limited and only located in the lower half of the lake. One concrete boat ramp exists (on Rt. 659, off of Rt. 631, aka Rio Road), and parking is limited. The other main access point, off Route 676 on the Ivy Creek arm of the reservoir, is an informal access that has a gravel bank launch and very limited parking. Both access areas have well defined trails nearby for bank anglers with the Ivy Creek access being adjacent to Ivy Creek Park. The Department of Wildlife Resources and Albemarle County continue to look for opportunities to improve and develop boat access at this lake. Gas powered motors are prohibited in the reservoir, and anglers should make sure they have a good trolling motor and a well charged batteries to get around the large reservoir.

For more information on the Rivanna Reservoir, please contact:

Johnathan Harris  
District Fisheries Biologist  
Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources  
[johnathan.harris@dwr.virginia.gov](mailto:johnathan.harris@dwr.virginia.gov)  
(804) 305-8940

Table 1. Species account and catch rates for fish collected throughout Rivanna Reservoir in 2022.

Species	Electrofishing		
	Number Collected	Catch Rate (fish/hour electrofishing)	Percentage of Catch
American Eel	2	2	< 1
Black Crappie	28	28	2
Bluegill	41	41	3
Golden Shiner	5	5	< 1
Grass Carp	1	1	< 1
Largemouth Bass	73	73	6
Redear Sunfish	36	36	3
Smallmouth Bass	1	1	< 1
White Sucker	6	6	1
Gizzard Shad	> 1000	1000	84

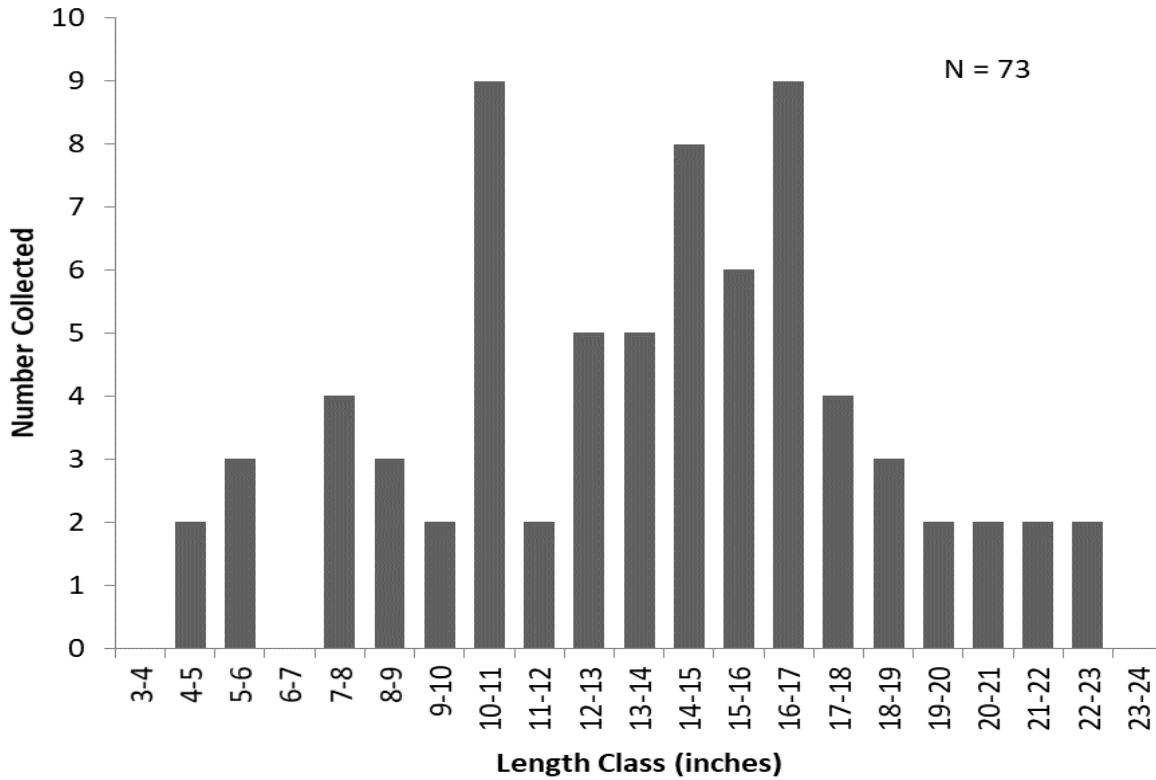


Figure 1. Length distribution of Largemouth Bass collected with electrofishing gear throughout Rivanna Reservoir in 2022.

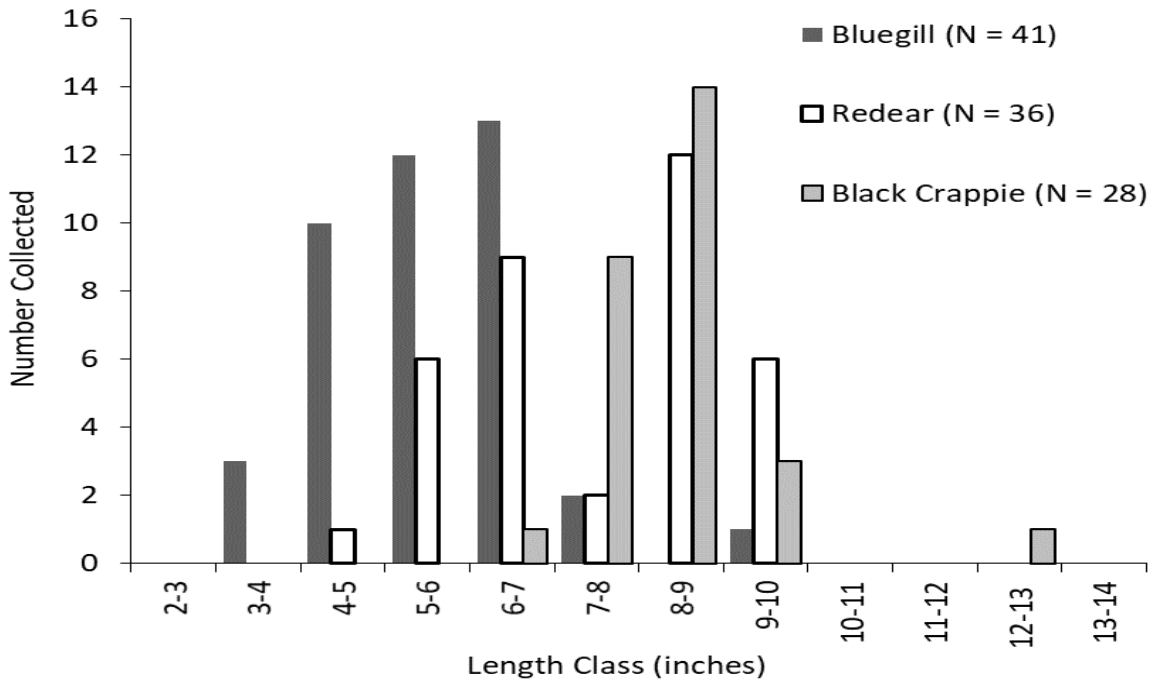


Figure 2. Length distribution of sunfish collected with electrofishing gear throughout Rivanna Reservoir in 2022.

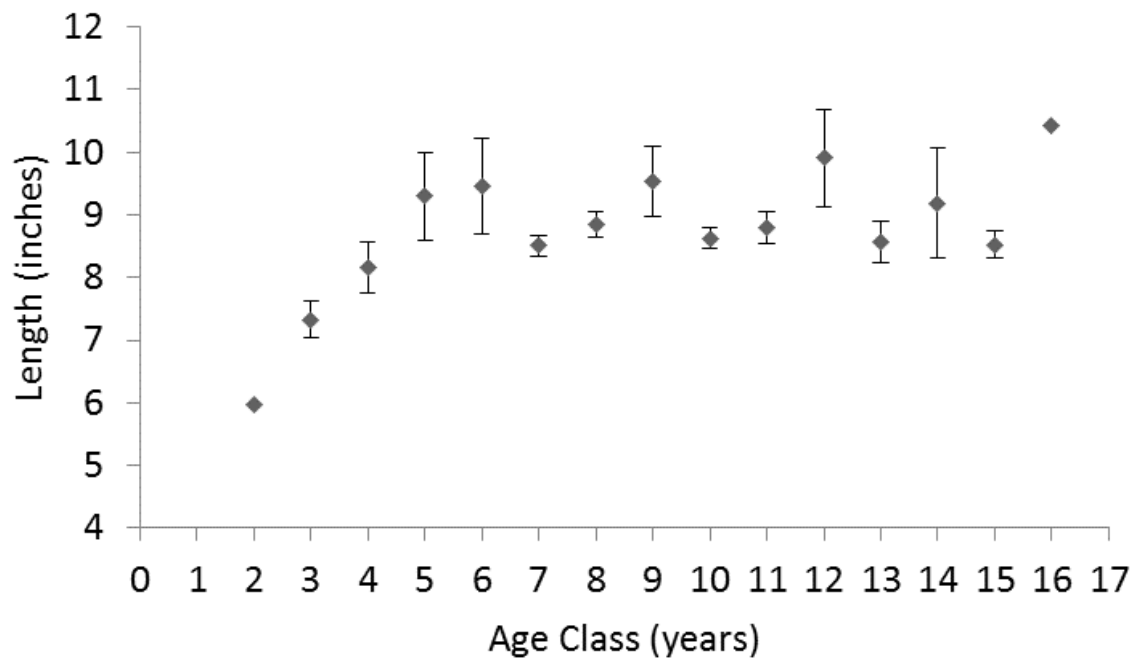


Figure 3. Average length-at-age of crappie collected throughout Rivanna Reservoir in 2019. Error bars indicate standard error.