

# SPECIES SPOTLIGHT

Look for it now in Southwest Ohio!

**7/25/2021**



Left to right: Rainbow Darter by fishofohio.com; Typical Habitat (Anderson Fork, a tributary of Caesar Creek Lake) by Travis Luncan

## **Rainbow Darter** (*Etheostoma caeruleum*)

By Travis Luncan, Water Protection Coordinator for City of Wilmington Water Department and Ohio Certified Volunteer Naturalist

Rainbow darters are small fish that grow to 2-3 inches. Their attractive coloration and color patterns rival many tropical aquarium fish. Darters are found in creeks and small to medium sized rivers throughout the eastern United States. They require good water quality to thrive, and prefer rocky and gravelly riffles, runs that are mostly silt free streams and that have a strong flow.

The rainbow darter is a bottom dweller, often resting under a rock or looking for food on the stream bottom. They eat small invertebrates; midge larvae are a favorite food for adult rainbow darters.

Spawning occurs late March into May, with breeding adults congregating in large numbers near riffles.

Darters can be observed in spring and early summer in shallow streams. Polarized sunglasses can help in viewing rainbow darters and other darters. If you are really adventurous, a swim mask and snorkel can help with viewing darters and other aquatic life.

To learn more about this species, visit [page 71 of the Ohio Division of Wildlife's Stream Fish of Ohio Field Guide](#).

## **FUN FACTS**

- Their scientific name comes from Greek *Etheo* (filter), *stoma* (mouth) and Latin *caeruleum* (blue).
- Male rainbow darters have about every color in the rainbow on their body, giving them their well-deserved name.
- They are related to perch and walleye.
- They dart around on the stream bottom, moving rapidly from one spot to another.
- The presence of rainbow darters is an indicator of good water quality.