

DARTER PHOTOGRAPHY WITH A LITTLE “FLARE”



Tyler Goodale

De Soto, Missouri

I don't think there is a native fish enthusiast anywhere who doesn't love darters. They're interesting, diverse, and downright gorgeous! Being a fan of their colors, especially the Orange-throat Darter (*Etheostoma spectabile*) variants, I wanted to figure out a quick way to get a good photo of their colors without causing much stress to the fish.

The technique would have to be quick, as some of these guys lose their best colors fast when messed with too much or left in a bucket for more than a few minutes.

Noticing that most fishes, including darters, flare their fins when handled, showing their best colors and fin rays perfectly, I had to figure a way to use this to my advantage.

Through a bit of trial and error, I figured out an almost fool-proof method. If timed right, it works great.

After practicing this for a while and producing some photos that surprised even me, a few others took notice. The great Snorkelmeister, Casper Cox, said I had a gift. Well, I felt the desire to share this “gift.”

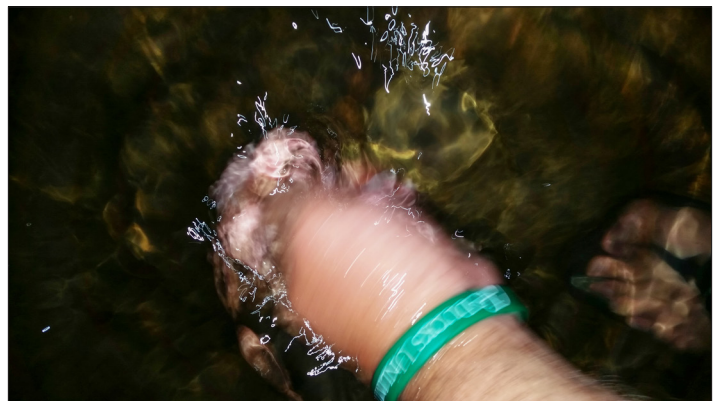
THE SHAKE

Hold the darter in your fist—not too tight, but with enough space to let them flare—and with your closed hand in the water, give them a gentle, but rapid, side-to-side shake. They will usually flare perfectly! This flare may only last a second or two, so it's best to have your camera ready as soon as you open your hand after the shake.

As far as what to capture the photos with, there are a thousand different cameras and flashes and such, but I typically just use my cell phone camera. The resolution (megapixels) is the same as or better than a lot of top-shelf digital

cameras out there, and it's super easy to transport and operate with one hand, while I get the darters to flare with the other. Whatever you use, if it is not waterproof, get a case. Don't blame me if you dunk your phone or camera.

Give this technique a try next spring. With a little practice and the right timing, you'll have some great in-hand darter photos in no time!



Rainbow Darter (*Etheostoma caeruleum*) before, during, and after the shake.

Photos by the author.

Some of Tyler Goodale's first steps were chasing Brook Darters and Redfin Shiners in a creek in Butler County, MO, and he has loved fish and fishing since. In a job-shadowing program in 1998 he met Bob Hrabik, who broadened his knowledge of fishes and introduced him to NANFA. Tyler has worked with the MO Dept. of Conservation on fisheries projects as an employee and as a volunteer. He is a nature nut, and loves getting his daughter, friends, and family in the water whenever possible.



A "super male" Brook Darter (*E. burri*) from the Black River drainage in Southeast Missouri.



Adult male Orangethroat Darter (*E. spectabile*) from the Meramec River drainage during the 2017 NANFA Convention.



Coosa Darter (*E. coosae*) from Collinsville, Alabama.



Male Harlequin Darter (*E. histrio*) from the Lower St. Francis River, Wappapello, Missouri.



Gilt Darter (*Percina evides*) from the Meramec River during the 2017 NANFA Convention.



Sunburst Darter (*E. mihileze*) from the Spring River Drainage in Southwest Missouri.



Current Darter (*E. uniporum*) from the Current River drainage near Doniphan, Missouri.



Slough Darter (*E. gracile*) from the Mingo National Wildlife Refuge ditch system.