

Blue Crab Fact Sheet

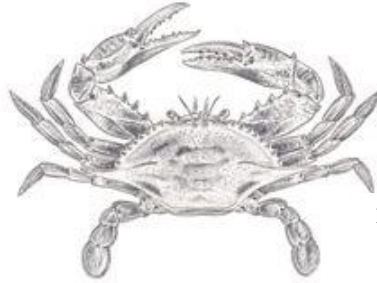


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Common name: Blue crab

Latin name: *Callinectes sapidus* - translates to “savory beautiful swimmer”

Characteristics:

- Blue crabs require both inshore brackish waters and salty ocean water to complete their life cycle.
- Males (or Jimmies) have T-shaped abdomens and brilliant blue claws and legs; females (or Sooks) have triangular shaped abdomens and bright orange tips on their claws.
- Mating occurs in brackish waters from February to November. Males mate several times but females mate only during the soft shell state after they molt. The female carries the spongy orange egg mass under her abdomen until spawning, and is often referred to as a “sponge crab.”

Distribution:

- Common from Massachusetts to Texas

Fisheries:

- The commercial crab fishery in South Carolina is relatively small, harvesting 4.3 million pounds in 2005. The largest blue crab fisheries are in Louisiana, Maryland, Virginia and North Carolina. Alabama is the center of processing in the Gulf whereas much of the processing on the Atlantic coast occurs in the Chesapeake Bay region.
- Blue crabs are captured in a baited wire trap with two to four entrance funnels and two chambers.

Management:

- Overall, the health of the U.S. blue crab population is good. The stocks are not overfished nor experiencing overfishing. Fishing pressure is intense, but like shrimp, crabs have a very short life cycle and grow quickly. The populations are at low levels of abundance, primarily due to loss of habitat, poor water quality and other environmental factors.
- Environmental factors (drought, flood, temperature, water circulation) can influence the crabs’ early life cycle and population level. Poor water quality and loss of habitat due to coastal development pose larger threats to the crab population than do fishing.
- Recent blue crab harvest in South Carolina has been lower than average, but within normal fluctuations. The decline in harvest may be partially attributable to the reduced price per pound paid in the fall. The number of blue crab caught in SCDNR trawl samples began to increase in late 2003, indicating recovery from the lengthy drought 2001-2002. In addition, the fall crab potting survey in 2005 yielded the largest number of mature females since 1988.
- Though regulations vary by state, they tend to include size limits, protection of female crabs, gear limits, possession limits, closed areas, reporting requirements and licenses.

Sources: SC Department of Natural Resources, State of Blue Crab Update, 2006 and Sea Science Series publication -

<http://www.dnr.sc.gov/marine/publications.html>

Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission. 2001. The Blue Crab Fishery of the Gulf of Mexico: A Regional Management Plan. Univ. of Maryland Center for Env. Science Chesapeake Biological Lab. 2005. Stock Assessment of Blue Crab in the Chesapeake Bay. North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries – www.ncfisheries.net