



Blue Crab Fact Sheet

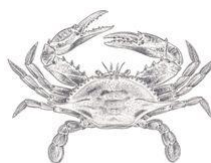


Image courtesy of Val Kells

Basic Biology

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

Range: Nearshore waters from Massachusetts to Texas

Habitat: Require both inshore brackish waters and salty ocean water in their life cycle

Diet: Opportunistic feeders, consuming fish, oysters, clams, snails, shrimp, worms and other crabs

Age and growth: Crabs reach maturity in 12-18 months and live only 1-3 years

Sustainability

- The commercial crab fishery in South Carolina is relatively small, harvesting 4 million pounds a year. The largest blue crab fisheries are in Louisiana, Maryland, Virginia and North Carolina, each harvesting 20-40 million pounds a year. Alabama is the center of processing in the Gulf whereas much of the processing on the Atlantic coast occurs in the Chesapeake Bay region.
- Overall, the health of the U.S. blue crab population is acceptable. 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.
- 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.
- Blue crabs are harvested in baited traps which have few negative effects on the ecosystem.

Info for Chefs

- The U.S. is currently the only sustainable source of blue crab. Domestic crab meat is becoming rarer and more expensive because of the high labor costs of removing the meat from the shell and the lack of a seasonal work force because of limits on the number of migrant worker visas.
- Soft shell crabs are females who are ready to mate. Reproduction is dependent upon water temperature and usually peaks in April in South Carolina.

Info for Servers

- 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.
- The male cradles his soft-shell mate beneath his body to protect her until her shell hardens. The female carries the spongy orange egg mass under her abdomen until spawning (often referred to as a "sponge crab").

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 MD 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