

**Common names**  
Japanese/Asian shore crab  
Brush-clawed crab

**Scientific names**  
*Hemigrapsus sanguineus*  
*Hemigrapsus takanoi*

@ Tina Hubbard



@Gregg Bessant



- Square crabs with three sharp points on each side. Species very similar, differing only in patterning, and eye crest. Fuzzy 'hair' on pincers of male brush-claws and a small bulb present on the pincers of Asian shore crabs.
- Asian shore crab up to 45 mm across, brush-clawed crab smaller, up to 25 mm across. Can be orangey-brown to greenish-black.
- Lifespan of around three years, maturing after the first year.
- Similar habitat to the native shore crab, found in rockpools under rocks and seaweed at low tide but naturally prefer soft sediment and estuaries.
- Little is known about their diet, but they have been known to feed upon juvenile shore crabs!
- There are no known natural predators of these crabs in Europe, but research is ongoing!
- *H. sanguineus* has a unique mating position in crabs as the pair face each other during the 30-60 minute copulation. Incubate eggs for 16-22 days before release and hatching at nocturnal high tide.
- Increasing population in the UK after being introduced from East Asia to Germany and the Netherlands. Both species have spread down the English Channel and are advancing along the South coast of Britain.
- Both of these species threaten our native shore crabs and it is possible that one day could replace them altogether!



Photo by Mandy Jarvis

## Common names

Japanese/Asian shore crab  
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## Scientific names

*Hemigrapsus sanguineus*  
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### Description

Small, square crabs with three sharp 'teeth' on each side of the carapace. Can vary in colour from orange through brown to green, and pale. Both crabs are very similar to each other. Crabs differ only in presence of spots (*H. takanoi* with dark spots on carapace) and hairs (*H. takanoi* adult males with 'brush' of hair on pincers), banding on legs (present in *H. sanguineus*), and small differences in the segmented crest beneath eye. Where adult male brush-claws exhibit 'fuzz' on their pincers, adult male Asian shore crabs have a bulbous lump.

### Habitat and shelter

Natively found in muddy sediment of estuaries but increasingly found in rockpools under rocks at low tide. This means they share this habitat with the native shore crab (*Carcinus maenas*) creating concerns as they will outcompete our native species.

### Feeding

Very little is known about feeding of these species, but the Asian shore crab has been known to prey upon juvenile native shore crabs.

### Reproduction

Crabs are fast breeders, producing many thousands of offspring every breeding season, which is one of the reasons the brush-clawed crab is spreading around the coast at an alarming rate. Their larvae planktonic stage is easily spread in shipping vessels' ballast water, explaining their population explosions in harbours and ports.

### Fun facts

The Brush-clawed crab was first found on the Thanet Coast in 2015, and populations have been increasing at a very rapid rate (The Asian shore crab has not been found here yet). It was only discovered to be its own species separating from *H. penicillatus* in 2005. Research suggests that the invasive species' success is that they have no natural parasites (as in Asia) allowing populations to increase without control.

### References

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