

Common names

Edible Crab

Scientific name

Cancer pagurus



- Red coloured 'pie crust' shell with black tipped claws.
- Adults usually measure in about 14-15cm width.
- Lifespan thought to be up to 20 years.
- All across rocky shores, from rock pools and under stones.
- Omnivorous, feeding mostly on flesh of other species it finds dead or alive.
- Actively hunts shore crabs and crustaceans.
- Mating in Spring/Summer after moulting.
- Females carry eggs for 6-9 months before the larvae is released the next Spring/Summer.
- Majority of larger crabs found offshore.
- Younger crabs curl legs and claws up to protect themselves.



Greg Bessant

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Description

Readily identified by its red colour and its 'pie crust' shell, and black tips to its claws. This species can grow to a width of 25cm. However adult crabs are generally found to be 14-15cm. This crab is a powerful chunky crab with very strong claws.

Habitat and shelter

Smaller younger crabs can be found in the intertidal region on rocks usually under stones. Larger edible crabs can be found at the extremities of the rock pools during Spring tides and the Summer when the tide is at its lowest. In Thanet they are found in large crevices and holes in the chalk reef. However most of the commercially caught crabs are caught in pots which are left offshore.

Feeding

Generally eats the flesh of all types of prey it can find, dead or alive. Most crabs are omnivorous so they can supplement their diet with plant matter. However they are active predators of crustaceans and shore crabs. They use their claws to tear food into manageable sizes to place in their mouth which is situated between their claws.

Reproduction

Mating occurs during the Spring/Summer after the females have moulted. Later the females become 'berried' with a cluster of eggs on her underside flap. She carries these for 6-9 months and releases the larvae offshore in the following Spring or Summer. These larvae move back inshore to feed and eventually change into crabs.

Additional information

The edible crab is locally known as the 'Punger Crab'.

The majority of larger crabs are found offshore. The lifespan is thought to be over 20 years. These crabs grow by moulting their shells and growing a new shell. Like other crabs this new soft shell is pumped by hydraulically to allow growth. After the moulting stage they are very vulnerable until the soft shell hardens after 3-7 days.

Fun facts

Younger crabs found inshore will protect themselves by curling up their legs and claws. If you find slightly larger edible crabs they have very strong claws. To demonstrate this, let them grip a pencil and you will see they can support their own weight with one claw. Evidence of claw marks will be seen on your pencil. Be careful of the claws as they can give a very painful nip and their legs can cause pain if they trap your finger as they curl in.

References

Marine Biological Association

Completed by Tony Sykes (2019/20)