

Common name Common Spider Crab

Scientific name *Maja brachydactyla*



- The Common Spider Crab has a circular to oval shell which is broad at the back and narrows at the front. The shell border has strong tapering spines and the main shell covered in smaller spines. It has small eyes either side of two distinct frontal spines. It's legs are narrow long segmented and covered with hairs and sometimes algae. The front pair of legs have small claws.
- It can grow up to 20cm long.
- Lives up to 7 to 10 years.
- Found on mixed shores usually in deep water to a depth of 50m and often found in pools and gullies at low tide.
- This crab uses its claws to extract food. As well as scavenging they eat starfish, brittlestars and marine worms.
- It is preyed on by gulls, shore birds, fish and sharks.
- Mating takes place and eggs are produced June to September which are stored on the female's abdomen. The eggs are initially a bright orange-red but turn brown during development which takes around 25 days. The eggs hatch as zoea larvae which go through several changes before becoming crabs.
- Although not a popular crab to eat in the UK they are exported to Europe. So there are restrictions on minimum landing size to prevent over-fishing.
- Unlike most crabs which walk sideways the Common Spider Crab can also walk forwards and backwards.



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Description

There are several types of Spider Crabs, the Common Spider Crab being the largest found in the British Isles. It is abundant on the west and south west coast but can be found locally in Thanet in smaller numbers. It can be found in a variety of colours such as red, pinkish, brownish-red, orange and yellow. The body is up to 20cm long (8"). It has a circular to oval shell which is broad at the back and narrows at the front. The shell border has strong tapering spines and the main shell covered in smaller spines. Part of its camouflage is to cover the shell with algae and other marine life blending it in with the seabed and making it hard to see unless it moves. It has small eyes either side of two distinct frontal spines. Its legs are narrow long segmented and covered with hairs and sometimes algae. The front pair of legs have small claws. The Common Spider Crab moults like other crabs often the various parts such as legs, claws and shell are found separately.

Habitat and shelter

Found on mixed shores usually in deep water to a depth of 50m and occasionally found in pools and gullies at low tide.

Feeding

They are scavengers and will eat numerous types of food including dead animals, small live animals and even graze on seaweed. They have poor eyesight but sensitive chemo-receptors on the tips of their legs help to locate their food. The front claws are not powerful like other crabs but are used like tools for extracting food.

Reproduction

Mating takes place and eggs are produced June to September which are stored on the female's abdomen. The eggs are initially a bright orange-red but turn brown during development which takes around 25 days. The eggs hatch as Zoea Larvae which go through several changes before becoming crabs. The Common Spider Crab can produce broods of eggs within 12 hours unlike other crabs.

Additional information

Unlike most crabs which walk sideways the Common Spider Crab can also walk forwards and backwards. It is sluggish and unaggressive.

They are harvested for food the leg meat is eaten.

Fun facts

The Japanese Spider Crab, not found in British waters, can grow to a size measuring 12 feet from tip to tip!

References

The Marine Biological Association.

MarLin - The Marine Life Information Network researched 24/1/18.

Collins Complete Guide to British Coastal Wildlife.

The Essential Guide to Beachcombing and the Strandline.

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