

Common name Shore Crab

Scientific name *Carcinus maenas*



Male and female undersides



"in berry" Photos by Greg Bessant

- Most commonly found crab.
- Has five upturned spikes on each side of the front of the carapace and three rounded lobes between the eyes.
- Usually green but its colour is highly variable; the variation in colour may be due to the stage of life/habitat.
- Juveniles are often mottled for camouflage.
- The carapace can be up to 9 cm wide.
- Predominantly found from the shore to shallow water under rocks, seaweed or in crevices but can be found down to 60m.
- Eats any dead animal matter, small fish/other creatures such as marine worms, mussels, barnacles and even smaller crabs.
- Fish and seabirds are the main predators.
- Mating often occurs after the female has moulted. Moults occur once or twice a year. The female carries the orange eggs on her underside and is said to be "in berry".
- Lives for about 5 years.
- Native species and abundant on all NE Atlantic coasts. Very invasive in USA and Australia.
- Crab blood is blue!



Common name
Shore Crab

Scientific name
Carcinus maenas

Description

Most common crab found on most coasts in the UK and Northern Europe. Mainly green shell but juveniles are found in a large variety of colours and patterns. Size about 10 cm when fully grown. The Shore Crab has five upturned spikes on each side of the carapace and 3 rounded lobes between the eyes.

Habitat and shelter

Lives in the intertidal rocks. Can generally be found under rocks, seaweed or in crevices.

Feeding

Could be referred to as the “hoover” of the seas as it tidies up any dead animal matter found on the sea bed. Will take small fishes and other creatures.

Age

Shore crabs are thought to live for up to five years. The first three years they are usually found in the intertidal part of the coast during most of the year although they go into deeper water during the winter. The males spend some of their time fighting over females, often losing legs and pincers. The amazing fact is that crabs can regrow new limbs. After about three years those older surviving crabs tend to spend the rest of their days in deeper water.

Reproduction

The summer is the moulting season for these crabs. When the female moults, she often secretes pheromones which attract male crabs. Crabs are very vulnerable when they shed their outer shell and are known as soft crabs. When the female does this, she will normally be found under a male crab who will protect her from predation. Following this, they will mate, the result being that the female becomes “in berry”. This can be seen as an orange roe like clump under the flap at the base of her underside. These eggs then hatch into tiny larvae that live on the surface of the sea. The larvae are planktonic for 2-3 years. They then settle on the sea bed and reach maturity in another year. They go through a number of changes in shape until they take on the final form as a crab.

Additional information

It is native to Europe but the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) has classified it as one of the top 100 worst invasive species in the world.

Fun facts

Crab blood is blue due to its copper content.

Why do crabs walk sideways? Crab joints can only move in one direction - up and down. (human limbs can move up and down and side to side) Crab legs are on the side of their shell so they move sideways most of the time. The advantage of this is that they can slide into crevices whilst protecting themselves with their claws.

References

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