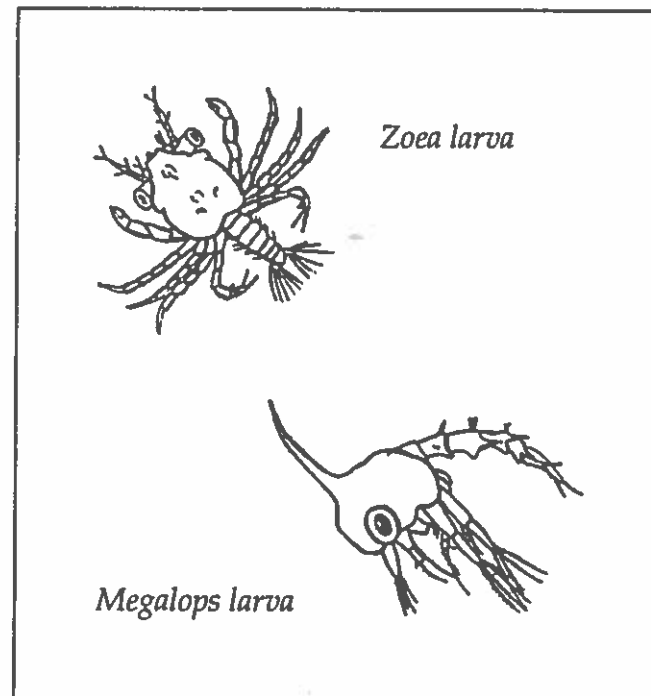


Finally the crab scuttles off to a protected hiding place until the new skeleton hardens. Young crabs may moult 8 times a year, older crabs 1 or 2 times. Hermit Crabs exchange small snail shells for larger ones to accommodate their growing bodies.

Regenerating (growing new) lost or damaged legs, claws, eyes or antennae is a fascinating and very handy ability of Decapods.

Crab sexes can be distinguished by looking at the underside of the animal. If the tucked-under abdomen is narrow and tapers to a point, it's a male. Females have broader abdomens that hold the egg mass beneath their bodies.

The life cycle of crabs begins with the courtship and mating of two adults. Eggs are laid and attached to some of the little legs on the underside of the female, protected inside the abdomen flap. The eggs hatch into hundreds of microscopic zoea larvae, which live a perilous life floating about in the sea with hungry fish and other predators. Some survive to change into a second larval stage called a megalops. The megalops larvae then change into tiny crabs.



Crab types you are likely to see around Nova Scotia include Rock Crabs (orange), Green Crabs (green) and Hermit Crabs (in snail shells), all fairly common in the intertidal zone of rocky seashores. Snow Crabs may turn up on Cape Breton wharves or in a sandwich. Other types are either deep-water species, or are just not often encountered.

## Resources

*Crab Wear Their Skeletons on the Outside* by John Hennigar-Shuh. Nova Scotia Museum, 1979.

*Pagoo (the story of a hermit crab)* by H.C. Holling. Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, 1957.

Crabs Fisheries Fact Sheet from Environment Canada.

*Canadian Atlantic Fauna: Decapoda* by M.J. Rathbun, Environment Canada, 1929.

*Crabs, Lobsters and Shrimps*. A Collection Loan from the Education Section of the Nova Scotia Museum, containing specimens and printed information.

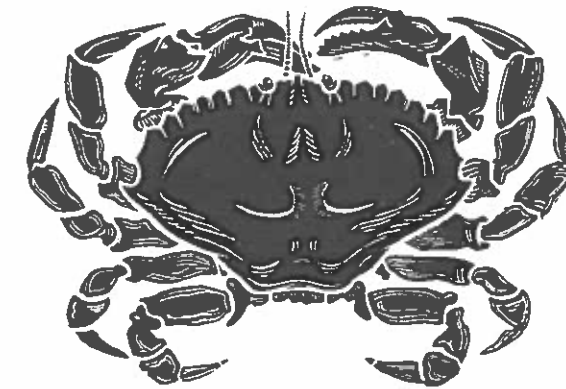


# info

Nova Scotia Museum 1747 Summer Street

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# CRABS



Crabs, lobsters and shrimps belong to a group of animals called Decapods. "Deca" refers to "ten" and members of this group have five pairs of legs, including one pair usually specialized as claws. The Decapods are part of a larger group of animals without backbones, but supported instead by a hard, jointed external skeleton — the Crustaceans.

Compared to lobsters and shrimps, crabs have very small abdomens or "tails," are larger, and coiled instead of folded.

## CRAB FACTS

Getting around on the sea bottom means walking, swimming, burrowing or a bit of all three. Good swimmers, like the Blue Crab, have their last pair of legs flattened like paddles. These legs work much like propellers. Some swimming crabs can maneuver forwards, backwards, sideways and can even catch fish. Walking crabs, like the common Green Crab, can often scuttle sideways very quickly, but can walk forward only slowly. Deep-water crabs, like the Toad Crab, have long slender legs for

crawling over soft sea bottoms. The Mud Crab and Sand Crab can burrow.

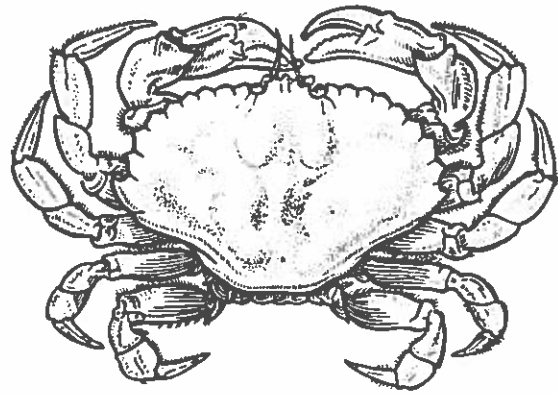
Eating can be a messy business. Crabs may be predators, scavengers or even filterers of mud.

They eat dead creatures found on the sea bottom. The more agile species may capture starfish, sea urchins or other crabs. Two large claws, usually one crusher and one pincer, hold the food and tear it apart. Small claw-like mouthparts pick out bite-size pieces and pass them in to grinding mandibles.

Growing takes some special techniques. Soft-bodied crabs are encased in hard external skeletons that do not grow. Crabs grow larger in bursts, using a process called moulting. First the crab grows a second, soft shell right beneath the old hard one. Then the outer shell cracks open along the back, just under the main back shell plate (the carapace). The complete crab then backs out the crack, taking legs, claws and even eyestalks and antennae along. Free of its old small skeleton, the crab soaks up sea water and grows by as much as 25%. It may eat its old shell to supply calcium to harden the new one.

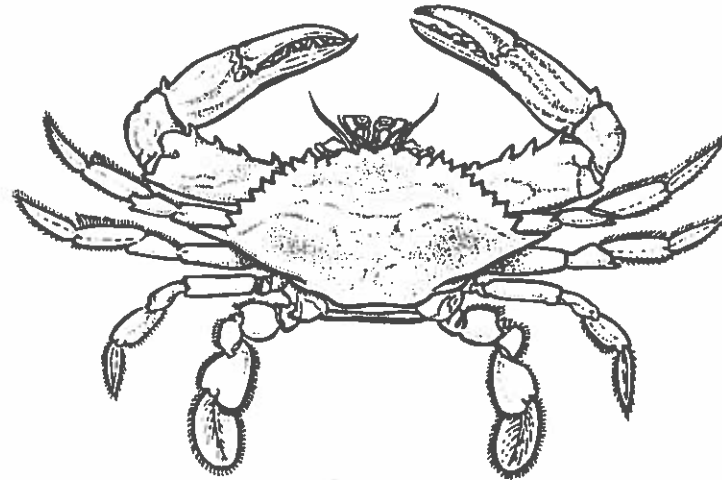
# Nova Scotia Crabs

(not to scale)



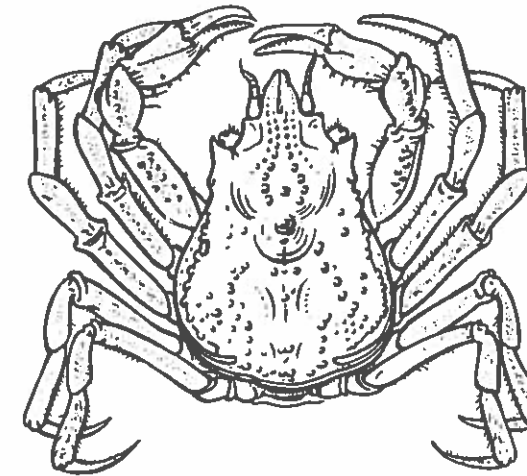
**ROCK CRAB** *Cancer irroratus*

Common from the lower intertidal zone down. Often taken in lobster traps. Edible, but not often eaten. Orange colour, carapace up to about 16 cm wide.



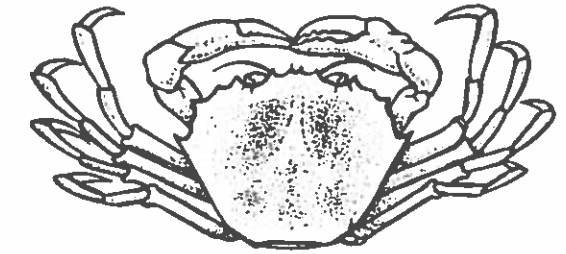
**BLUE CRAB** *Callinectes sapidus*

Sometimes seen in warm sheltered bays in southwest N.S., common and commercially important in the U.S.



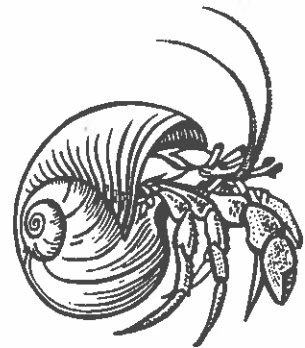
**TOAD CRAB** *Hyas araneus*

Toad-sized body. Found offshore on muddy and stony bottoms, to 500 m. Important food of codfish.



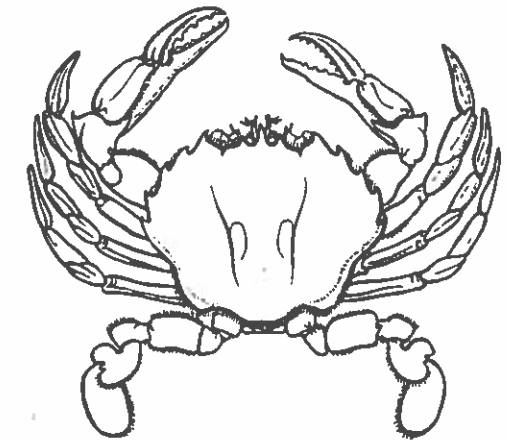
**RED CRAB** *Geryon quinquidens*

Found in deep water along the edge of the continental shelf, south of Halifax. A large crab that supports a fishery, mostly in the United States; span about 60 cm.



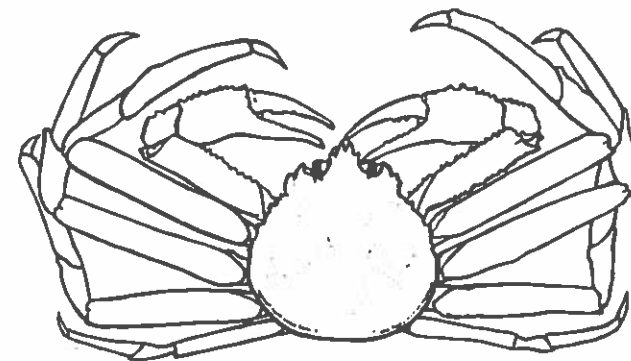
**HERMIT CRAB** *Pagurus acadianus*

Not a true crab, but several types are common all around our coast, in the intertidal zone and on the banks.



**LADY or SAND CRAB** *Ovalipes ocellatus*

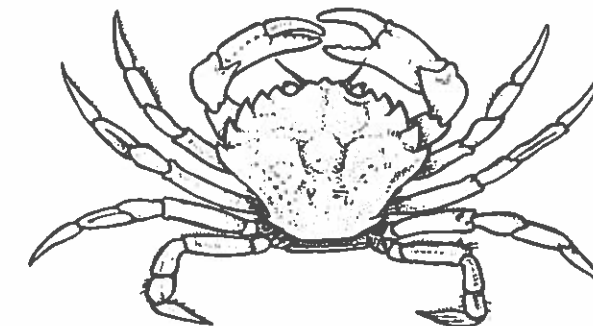
In N.S. found only in Minas Basin. A warm-water crab, a survivor from long ago, when Nova Scotia's climate was warmer. White, with red and purple spots.



**QUEEN CRAB or SNOW CRAB**

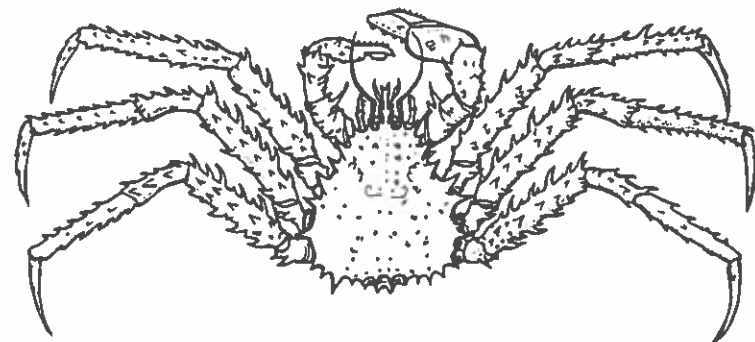
*Chionectes opilio*

Large offshore crab, supports a lucrative commercial fishery off Cape Breton Island.



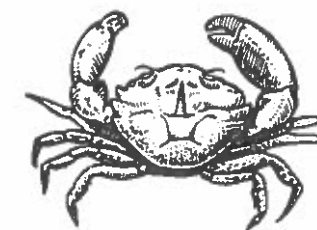
**GREEN CRAB** *Carcinus maenas*

Small crab, common intertidally in south west N.S. and Minas Basin. Very active; called "le crabe enragé" in French.



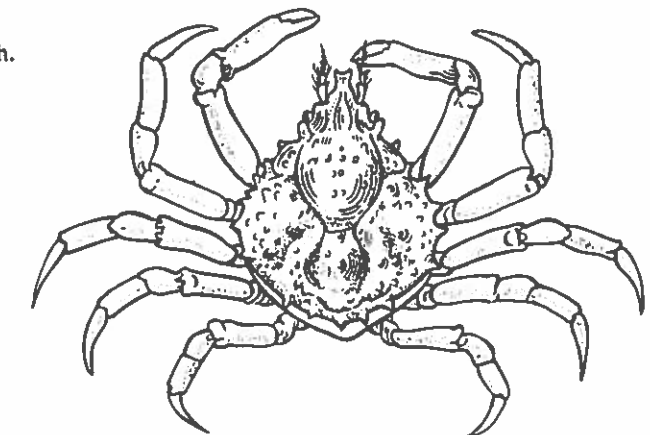
*Lithodes maia*

Not a true crab. Up to about 75 cm across span of legs. Found offshore, depths to 500 m. Note fifth pair of legs is rudimentary.



**MUD CRAB** *Neopanope texana*

A small crab living in eelgrass beds in the warm sheltered waters of Northumberland Strait. Ours have been isolated from other populations for thousands of years.



**SPIDER CRAB** *Libinia emarginata*

Found on muddy bottoms in shallow water, particularly Minas Basin. Span across legs up to 30 cm.