

Blue Crab: *Callinectes sapidus*



The Atlantic Blue Crab is a crustacean found in the waters of the western Atlantic Ocean, the Pacific coast of Central America and the Gulf of Mexico. The Blue Crab is an omnivore, eating both plants and animals, including carrion as well as other Blue Crabs. In Louisiana the Blue Crab is the second largest shellfish industry and an important part of recreational fishing as well.

Male and female Blue Crabs are distinguished from one another by their abdomens, which are narrow in males, but wide and rounded in females. When the female is about to become sexually mature, she molts (sheds outer covering) and then mates with a male. The male's

sperm is transferred to special sacs inside the female for use at a later time. After mating, and toward the end of the season, the impregnated "sooks" (female crabs) will migrate to the high-salinity waters. Here, she actually fertilizes her eggs with the previously stored sperm and spawns (releases eggs into the water).

The female will mate only once in her life, but can produce from 750,000 to as many as 8 million eggs. The eggs hatch in water between 66-84°F and in salinities between 23-35 parts per thousand (normal seawater salinity is 35 parts per thousand). Only a tiny fraction of these eggs will result in a mature adult. Juvenile Blue Crabs migrate into the lower saline and even fresh water areas of the system where they continue to grow, reaching maturity after 18-20 post-larval molts with a life expectancy of 2-4 years.