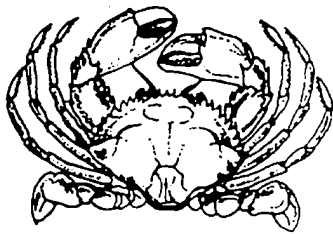


Crabs

Habitat of estuarine and freshwater crabs

Habitat	No. of species
Rocky shores	20
Mangrove swamps	2
Sandy beaches	13
Mud flats	6
Inside mollusc shells	2
Rocks	3



Crabs and the moon

The lunar cycle is thought to influence the occurrence and body composition of crabs. The highest numbers of crabs are found during the full moon, while the weight of the crabs is highest during a new moon.

People believe that during a new or full moon, the texture and taste of crab meat changes considerably. This is due to moulting of the shell and seasonal variations in the chemical composition of the meat.

Though they are an important source of food, little is known about crabs on the west coast of India. Information on the diversity of these fascinating creatures is confined to crabs collected from sandy beaches, rocky foreshores, mud flats, marshes and mangrove swamps.

Altogether 83 species of the crabs have been reported along the west coast of India. Of these, 37 species are marine, 40 estuarine, and six live in freshwater.

Commercial value

Crabs are an inexpensive source of protein. They fetch a good price during the monsoon or off-season. Crab fishing provides livelihood for a large number of people in coastal villages.

Due to limited yield and great local demand, there is no export potential for crabs. Large annual fluctuations occur in the numbers caught. *Scylla serrata* is the most common edible crab of India. *Portunus pelagicus*, *Charybdis cruciata* and *Portunus sanguinoleutus* are other commercially important crabs; they are caught throughout the year and support a minor but regular fishery along the Goa coast.

The gear and methods for catching crabs are not highly specialized. Most are caught during the daytime using various types of conventional nets, traps, lines, bait and hand picking during low tide. The crabs are kept in baskets with wet weeds to reduce mortality, and are marketed live.

Ecological role

Crabs play an important role in recycling nutrients in mangrove ecosystems. They are a prime source of food for various fish, (including stingrays), frogs, crocodiles, swimming and wading birds, jackals and other carnivores. They are important scavengers of the seashore, making up in numbers what they lack in size.

Despite their ecological importance, crabs are often treated as a nuisance. They burrow actively, causing considerable damage to canal and river banks and pond bunds. This can cause heavy losses to commercial aquaculture.

Crab culture

There is no regular culture in India specifically for crabs. Though *Scylla serrata* and *Portunus* spp. are suitable for culture due to

their high growth rate, adaptability to brackish water, voracious feeding and early attainment of sexual maturity, no attempt has been made to raise them commercially. The coastal and brackish water farms of Goa could be used to culture these species.

Conservation

The best way to conserve crabs is to protect their habitat. Some commercially important species inhabit mudflats and sandy beaches. These and related habitats such as mangroves can be protected by minimizing erosion, planting *Casuarina* trees and protecting sand dunes.

Information kit produced by
WWF-India, Goa Division and the
International Institute of Rural
Reconstruction.

Crab species along the west coast

Marine species

Dromia dromia
Matuata planipes
Leucosia pubescens
Leuosia sima
Arcania septemspinosa
Droppe astuta
Cryptopodia aneulata
Scylla serrata
Neptunus sanguinolentus
Neptunus belagicus
Thalamita crenata
Thalamita prymna
Platypodia cristata
Xantho scaberrimus
Medaeus granulosus
Estisus laevimanus
Galene bispinosa
Actaea savignivi
Pilmunus vesperilio
Heteropanope levis
Eurycarcinus orientalis
Eriphia laevimana
Eucrate dentata
Litocheria setosa
Macrophthalmus latreille
Macrophthalmus pacificus
Macrophthalmus depressus
Macrophthalmus crinitus

Grapsus strigosus

Metopograpsus messor

Metopograpsus maculatus

Varuna litterata

Metaplex indica

Metaplex distincta

Plagusia tuberculata

Portunus pelagicus

Potrunus sanguinolentus

Estuarine species

Pseudodromia integrirong

Calappa lunaris

Philvra globosa

Philyra corallicola

Elamena cristatipes

Menaethius monoceros

Hyastenus planasius

Declea gracilipes

Paramithrax aculetus

Schizophrys aspera

Lambrus pensor

Atergatis integerrimus

Atergatis floridus

Atergatis roseus

Leptodius exaratus

Myomenippe hardwickii

Ozium regulosus

Epixanthus frontalis

Pilmunus longicornis

Litocheria angustifrons

Pinnotheres placunae

Pinnotheres cicafii

Ocyroda ceratophthalma

Ocyroda cordimana

Ocyroda rotundata

Gelasimus annulipes

Gelasimus marionis

Gelasimus nitidus

Gelasimus dussumieri

Dotilla myctiroides

Macrophthalmus pectinipes

Macrophthalmus sulcatus

Pseudograpsus intermedius

Sesarama quadrata

Sesarma oceanica

Sesarma taeniolata

Sesarma minuta

Paratelphusa spp.

Freshwater species

Charybdis cruciata

Charybdis jucifera

Charybdis annulata

Charybdis callianassa

Charybdis orientalis

Charybdis hoplites

Prepared by Anil Chatterji