


European Shore Crab

Carcinus maenas

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 **Pathway** • Natural spread • Ballast water • Hull fouling • Aquaculture • Fishing

Impacts

Biodiversity

Generalist nature means it can affect marine biodiversity at various trophic levels through competition and predation. Feeds on animals in 14 different phyla so has the potential to affect community structure by causing local extinctions of native species.

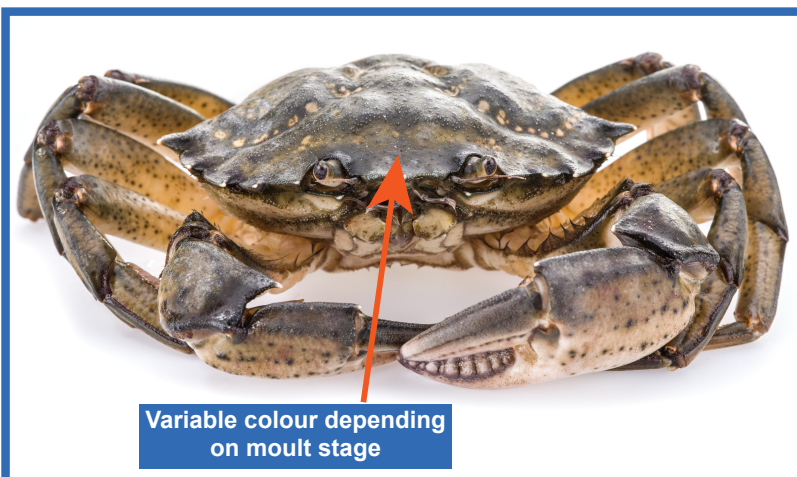
Human Health

None known.

Economy

Predatory and competitive abilities mean it can have a negative impact on economically important shellfish species.

Key ID Features



Description

Shell serrated, and fan shaped with distinctive three rounded lobes between the eyes and five teeth or spines on each side of the eyes. The shell is wider than it is long with the gap between the fifth teeth on either side of the eyes indicating the widest point. Two curved pleopods (forked swimming limbs) under the abdominal flap that touch in the central part of the curve.

Size

Up to 6 cm long and 9 cm wide, but more commonly a few cm wide.

Colour

Highly variable depending on molt cycle, ranging from brown and green to orange and red. Consequently, colour should not be relied on for identification. The body and legs can have brown spots.

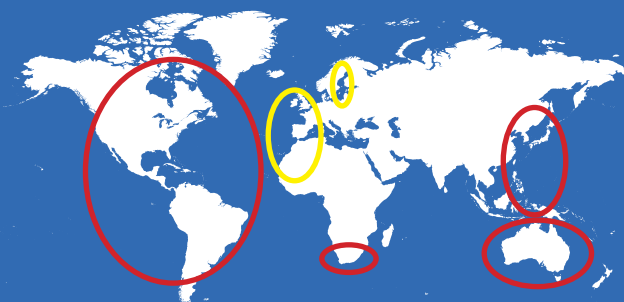
*Note: Images not to scale



Distribution

 **Native range:** Atlantic Europe, western Baltic and west Africa.

 **Non-native range:** Global, including North & South America, Australia, South Africa and East Asia.



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Habitat and Ecology

Habitat: Generalist that can be found in a variety of habitats including soft and hard substrates on most coastlines. Predominantly inhabits intertidal and shallow subtidal areas but can be found to depths of 60 m.

Environmental preferences: Can tolerate a wide range of salinities and temperatures.

Diet: Omnivore which consumes a huge variety of species.

Reproduction: High reproductive rates. Reaches sexual maturity at 1 - 2 years. Female crabs can carry up to 200,000 fertilised eggs. Eggs hatch into free swimming planktonic larvae that live in the water column for 17 - 80 days. During this time larvae undergo 5 stages of change before maturing into an adult. Duration of any stage is temperature dependent. Larvae have a more limited temperature and salinity range than adults. This may limit the species' ability to spread and establish in certain locations. Adults live 3 - 6 years, females tend to have a shorter life span compared to males.

Confusion with similar species

Distinct features of *Carcinus maenas* are the three rounded lobes between the eyes and five teeth or spines on each side of the eyes.

Carcinus maenas has curved pleopods that touch *and* is a slightly wider shape than the closely related *Carcinus aestuarii* (pictured below).



If you think you have seen this species, please contact the person below who will confirm its identity.

Please also refer to the mitigation strategies guidance document, provided as part of the Marine Biosecurity Toolkit.

Further Information

- <https://www.cabi.org/isc/datasheet/90475>
- <https://www.marlin.ac.uk/species/detail/1497>
- <http://www.iucngisd.org/gisd/species.php?sc=114>

Images

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