

Intertidal Crabs

FIDDLER CRAB (UCA)

Fiddler crabs are small to medium sized crabs that live in burrows in the intertidal zone. They grow to about four centimeters in length and are brightly coloured. There are 16 species in Australia.

Fiddler crabs have two claws, but in the male, one claw is much larger than the other. This larger nipper can be on the right or left side. The large claw is brightly coloured and is waved up and down (like a fiddle player's arm) for display, to warn other crabs away from their territory and to attract females for mating. Each species has its own colour patterns, with the female being darker and duller than males.

At low tide much time is spent feeding on organic matter that they extract from the mud using the small claws. The male eats only with its small claw; whereas the female uses both claws and therefore does not need to spend as much time gathering food.

Fiddler crabs stay close to their burrows so that if they sense danger they can quickly disappear down them. Unwary fiddler crabs are food for birds such as Whimbrels and Eastern Curlews.

Before the in-coming tide covers the burrows, each crab seals its entrance with a plug of mud to trap a bubble of air inside. They also clean their burrow of old used mud and replace it with fresh mud they can feed on. The crabs stay in their burrow during high tide.

The crabs mate in male burrows. The females deposit their eggs in the sea. These hatch into larvae that drift in the currents of the sea as plankton until they wash up in intertidal areas. They then dig burrows and continue their lives as Fiddler crabs.



Compressed Fiddler Crab