

Swimming Crabs

Mud Crab

Scylla serrata

As with prawns, crayfish and lobsters, a mud crab belongs to the order Decapoda, meaning 10 legs. One pair for swimming, three middle pairs for walking and the first pair of claws for capturing and breaking up food and displays of dominance.

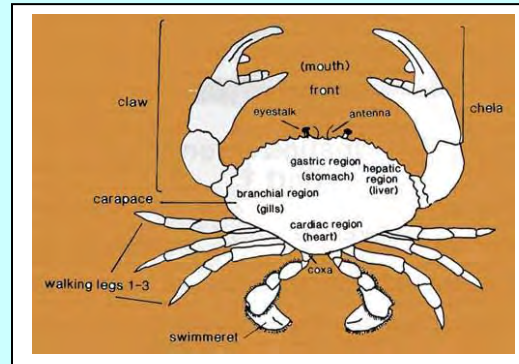
Mud crabs live in estuaries especially in the waters around mangroves. They make their homes in the mud and can dig burrows up to two metres long. They feed on snails, worms, shellfish, small crabs and dead animals.

Adult mud crabs can measure up to twenty centimetres across the carapace and weigh as much as two kilograms. They can live for about three years. Their dull brown-green-blue colouring provides excellent camouflage. Due to their size, mud crabs have few enemies, however they are preyed upon and eaten by large fish, (eg. Cod and crocodiles).

Male mud crabs (bucks) can be distinguished from females (jennies) by having a narrow triangular flap on the underside, compared to the females wider, darker flap. Male mud crabs usually have larger claws than the females. These crabs can be found throughout Australia, Asia, islands of the Pacific, India and Africa.

A female mud crab will attract a male mud crab by releasing a chemical into the water. The male will carry the female to the burrow, where, after she moults, mating will take place.

After mating, the female crab swims out to sea where the water is deeper, cooler and saltier and more suitable for crab larvae. Through tagging studies and netting it has been found females release their fertilised eggs after travelling about 30 kilometres out from the coast. The eggs are laid in several batches of two to six million. The mother mud crab carries the eggs under her tail flap for two to four weeks until they hatch into larvae. The larvae drift as plankton in the currents of the sea for about a month, they change into small crab-like forms, then swim back to the shallow waters where they grow into small mud crabs.



As they grow, mud crabs need to moult or shed their old shell before a new, bigger one can form. The new shell is very soft and must be pumped with water to fill the space of the new shell. They do this up to 16 times until they reach 15cm (legal size).

A special type of growth process, regeneration, allows lost or damaged parts to be replaced. These replacements are needed when legs or claws are lost in fights with other animals.

Mud crabs are active at night when they search for their food. They feed on snails, worms, small animals and plant material.

Mud crabs excrete urine from holes between their eyes.

They are considered delicious and are eagerly sought after by many fishermen. Mud Crabs are subjected to heavy fishing pressures.

Most crabs are caught in crab pots or dillies. All females must be released unharmed. Taking off one or more claws and releasing is illegal and will most likely result in death of crabs as it cannot defend itself or eat normally.

