

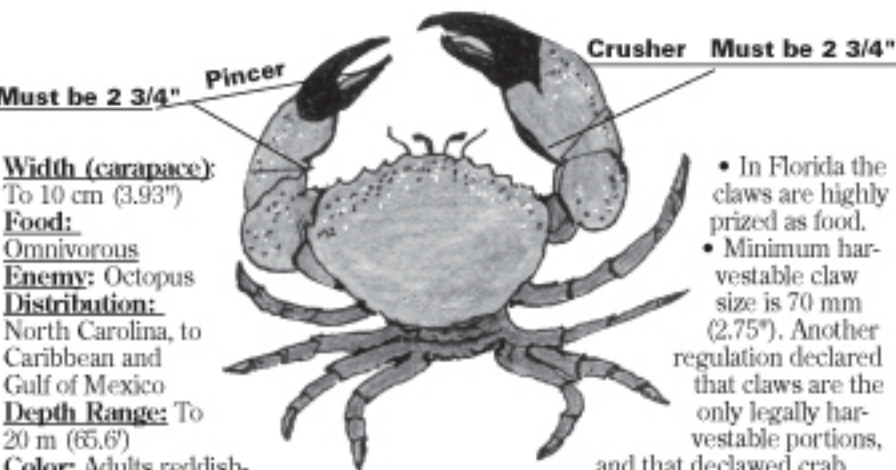
SEA WATCH

Gerald Dratch, Mote Marine Laboratory volunteer

Stone Crab

Infraorder Brachyura (true crab)-Menippe mercenaria-Family Xanthidae

In the true crab only, the skeletal plate above the mouth is fused to the chitinous shell, or carapace. The classification of crabs is subject to differing opinions.



Width (carapace):

To 10 cm (3.93")

Food:

Omnivorous

Enemy: Octopus

Distribution:

North Carolina, to Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico

Depth Range: To

20 m (65.6')

Color: Adults reddish-brown and spotted grey or white; claw tips dark brown to black.

Claws: Two powerful and disproportionately large claws, which constitute approximately one-half the body weight in adult individuals.

• In Florida the claws are highly prized as food.

• Minimum harvestable claw size is 70 mm (2.75"). Another regulation declared that claws are the only legally harvestable portions,

and that declawed crab bodies must be returned to

the water.

• Researchers found that a pincer claw will change to a crusher if the original crusher is lost, suggesting that the crusher is the major claw.

• Legal size claws are removed at a specialized joint. This is because the crab has the ability to deliberately lose an appendage without harm and re-grow that appendage (autotomy).

• Adult stone crabs are able to regenerate approximately 70 percent of the original claw size in the first molt and reach 100 percent of that size in the subsequent molt.

• Large juvenile males molt 2-3 times per year, principally in midsummer through late fall. Mature males molt at least once per year, during winter. Most mature females molt in spring and fall.

• Male stone crabs mate with females only immediately after the females molt, and males must be in the intermolt phase when they mate.

• Stone crabs are high-level predators in our waters, and often exhibit a preference for bivalves.