

Identifying Crabs at Maroochy Wetlands Sanctuary

The old saying "Rules were meant to be broken" seems to apply when it comes to crab identification. In general, the Ocypodid family have long eye-stalks and the Grapsid family have short eye-stalks..... But as the saying goes.....

The first identification feature to look for is the length of the eye-stalk. Other important features are carapace shape including teeth, colour, Chelae shape and colour, size, mouth-part markings.

OCYPODID CRABS

Ocypodid crabs normally inhabit open areas. To avoid predators, they need to recognize attacks from above, and long eye-stalks located closely together allow them to see above the close environs and be aware of horizons.



Semaphore Crab *Heloecius cordiformis*

To 25 mm carapace width. Long-eyed. Carapace mottled dark purple. Purple claws (M), orange-red (F & J) Narrow white bands on mouth parts



Orange-clawed Fiddler Crab *Uca coarctata*

To 40 mm. Long-eyed. Male has one large claw, palm orange with rough upper surface, white finger tips. White spot on last walking leg (m). Light under body. Back black with white tooth at front sides. Highly variable colouration. Most common fiddler at MWS.



Two-toned Fiddler Crab *Uca vomeris*

To 30 mm. Long-eyed. Male has one large claw, lower half of hand orange, upper half light (grey/pink/bluish-white). Broad white bands on mouth parts. Mostly found in open area off first loop to the crab hide at MWS.

Pink-clawed Fiddler Crab *Uca polita*

To 25 mm. Long-eyed. Male has one large claw, arm and hand rose-pink, fingers white. Small claw rose-red. Small colony amongst the *Uca vomeris*.



Grey-clawed Fiddler Crab *Uca longidigita*

To 25 mm. Long-eyed. Male has one large claw pale grey-blue (m). Broad whitish mark on lower part of mouth parts. Along bank opposite far crab hide at MWS.



Yellow-clawed Fiddler Crab *Uca perplexa*

To 16 mm. Long-eyed. Stalks thicker than other fiddlers. Whitish mouth parts. Carapace more square than other fiddlers. Male has one large yellow claw. Occasionally seen at far crab hide and rarely up river of pontoon.



(Fiddler Crab - No common name) *Uca dussumieri*

To 30 mm. Long-eyed. Carapace black, narrowing towards back end. As a fiddler, the male has one large claw, rough surfaced, upper finger white, lower finger rose with white tip, merus (forearm?) blue or with rose below, rose at base of chelae. Body more deeply vaulted than other fiddlers. Legs muddy in colour. Found amongst *Uca coarctata* at far crab hide.

Orange-spined Sentinel Crab *Macrophthalmus crassipes*

To 40 mm. Long-eyed. Carapace width is about twice length. Plain muddy-olive. Does have an orange spine on the chelae, but not visible in the field.

Australian Sentinel Crab *Macrophthalmus setosus*

To 40 mm. Long fine eyes. Similar to Orange-spined, but not as broad - (width is about 1-1/2 times length)



Smooth Sentinel Crab *Macrophthalmus punctulatus*

12 mm. Short stout eyes. Rectangular carapace, 1.3 times wider than long. Muddy brown colour. Hairy legs.



Pacific Blue-clawed Sentinel *Macrophthalmus pacificus*

To 35 mm. Long-eyed. Carapace roughly oval, grey-brown washed blue, legs may be blue-washed, hands of claws blue. Vertical black and white markings on mouth parts. Likes soft wet sand/mud, often feeds in shallow still water.



Giant Sentinel *Macrophthalmus latrielli*

To 60 mm. Long-eyed. Carapace grey/brown, with several large sharp teeth behind eyes. Burrows in very soft mud. Is found at lowest tide in front of far crab hide.

GRAPSID CRABS

Crabs of the Grapsid family generally inhabit areas with mangroves, rocks, or other cover. To protect themselves from predators, they need to be able to judge distance, and thus their eyes require good separation and short eye-stalks.



Furry-clawed Crab *Australoplax tridentata*

To 12 mm, normally to 10 mm. Short-eyed. Purple/blue claws, brown furred fingers with orange tips. Broad white bands on mouth parts. Most numerous crab at MWS, found in many habitats.



Maroon Mangrove Crab *Perisesarma messa*

To 25 mm. Short-eyed, wide apart, eye-stalks red, eye green. Carapace dark, squarish, appears ridged across, tooth on edge behind eye. Chelae always maroon.



Broad-fronted Mangrove Crab *Metopograpsus frontalis*

To 30 mm. Short-eyed wide apart. Carapace smooth, mottled, squarish but narrower at back. Arms and claws purplish. Appears lobed across front of carapace. Hard to find. Does not burrow and requires suitable habitat



Red-fingered Marsh Crab *Parasesarma erythodactyla*

To 25 mm. Short-eyed at edge of carapace. Orange to brown arms and claws, with red finger-tips. (M). Carapace shield shaped, green to pale blue, sometimes with two black markings on male. Female and juvenile very dark green/black, (patterned.) Easily recognized and found from the Casuarina forest and throughout the mangrove areas.



Purple and Cream Shore Crab *Pseudohelice subquadrata* (formerly *Helice leachii*)

To 25 mm. Short-eyed. Stout claws. Arms greyish-purple, claws and fingers cream. Thick-bodied, squarish carapace greyish-purple or blackish with two notches each side, some cream on back, legs mottled. Orbital tooth. Classified as nocturnal, but plentiful, and often seen during the day battling over yellow leaves, especially after tidal inundation. Around both crab hides and shelter sheds.



Scarlet Three-spined Mangrove Crab *Neosarmatium trispinosum*

To 40 mm. Short-eyed, wide apart, white on top. Deeply vaulted body appears meshed on sides. Carapace blackish. Claws large, scarlet, male has 3 short white spines near base of (top) moveable finger. Mud mound at burrow entrance. Nocturnal leaf-eater, but often seen during daylight at both crab hides and in Orange-fruited Mangrove forest.



Ward's Hairy-legged Crab *Paracleistostoma wardi*

To 18 mm. Short-eyed, mid way across carapace. Carapace smooth, appears to have cut-off triangle at front sides, edges behind eyes orange and lack teeth. Legs broad, flattened, furry. Claws small and orange. Generally feeds in shallow water in Orange Mangrove forest.

SWIMMING CRABS

Swimming crabs vary from land dwelling species in that they have three sets of walking legs and one set of flattened swimming legs. Two of the three species known at the sanctuary form a valued resource for the commercial fishery, and mangroves are the nursery for many species. These commercial species leave the sanctuary when small. The third species, Green Swimming Crab, *Thalamita crenata*, is rarely seen in the water near the far crab hide.

Mud Crab *Scylla serata*

To 200 mm. Short-eyed. Carapace olive-green, front half is almost a semi-circle with many teeth, back half narrows noticeably. Three sets of walking legs, and one set of swimming appendages. Commercial species, but only seen less than half-grown at MWS. May be seen swimming over the mudflats during tidal inundation.

Blue Swimming Crab *Portunus pelagicus*

To 190 mm. Carapace mottled blue, brown, olive, strongly patterned. Prominent spine in centre of carapace on each side. Claws long and relatively fine. Seen in shallow water near pontoon or far crab hide.

HERMIT CRABS

Two species of hermit crabs are occasionally seen, especially around the Orange Mangroves. Both species use discarded mollusc shells. The Yellow-striped Hermit is the more common and is recognized by the yellow stripes on legs, claws and body. Basic body and appendage colour is dark green. The Yellow-footed Hermit is also dark green, but has yellow markings on the ends of the walking legs and claws.

