



Green Crab

Carcinus maenas

History

- * Believed to have first arrived in eastern North America around 1817, most likely in the dry ballast of cargo ships
- * Negative impacts on soft-shell clams and other bivalves have been documented since 1950s

Characteristics

- * Green to dark brown, sometimes with yellow, orange, or red, with darker mottling
- * Walking legs green, speckled with black
- * Carapace (shell) has 5 spines on each side
- * Can grow up to 3.9 in (10 cm) wide

Habitat

- * Salt marshes, sandy beaches, and rocky shores
- * Usually on mud, sand, or pebbles
- * Prefers sheltered areas
- * Usually near the low-tide line
- * Tolerates wide range of salinities (as low as 6 ppt)

Known Distribution

- * Newfoundland to Delaware; has become the most common crab in many locations throughout this range
- * Native to North Atlantic coast of Europe and the North African coast

Impacts

- * Has become a dominant predator, feeding on clams, oysters, crabs, and mollusks
- * Often blamed for collapse of soft-shell clam industry and reduction of other commercially important bivalves, including scallop and northern quahog



Green crab (*Carcinus maenas*)

Credit: P. Erickson for MIT Sea Grant College Program

