



C L E A R W A T E R

Navigator

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DON'T MISS OUR
ANNUAL GATHERING
SAT. OCTOBER 2! (DETAILS ON PAGE 2.)

H U D S O N R I V E R R E P O R T C A R D

THE CRABS ARE ALRIGHT

BLUE CRAB NUMBERS BURGEONING IN RIVER

Blue crabs (*Callinectes sapidus*) are decapods: they have two claws, three pairs of walking legs, and two swimmerets. They gain their structural integrity from an outer shell, which provides excellent protection but also presents a problem: unlike the animal inside, it does not grow. After a time the crab becomes literally compressed, and gets to a point where it must burst from its shell to form a new, larger one. The soft, flaccid animal that has just "molted" looks impossibly larger than the shell it has vacated.

Females are only able to mate during this soft state, and the males attach themselves belly-to-belly to the females, carrying them around upside-down so they'll be right handy when the molt occurs. Some scientists claim that the post-coital males stay near the females to protect them; others think that the males just go their way.

Crab eggs and larvae, released in the summer months, drift at the mercy of tides and currents from their home estuaries out to sea, and are found as far as forty miles offshore. After two months and as many as twelve molts,



Chris Bowser

In the shadows of Manhattan's skyline a fleet of 8-10 draggers from 40 to 80 feet long trawls for winter crabs – and apparently catch enough to make it worthwhile. (See dragger photo below.) How much isn't known, but it is certainly a lot more than the traditional trap fisheries upriver.

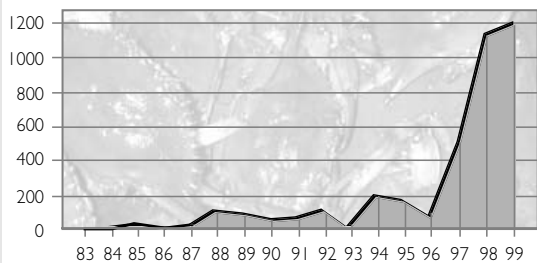
Despite heavy wintertime fishing, blue crabs are holding their own or increasing in the Hudson River. Two different sources of data both confirm what the scientists and fishers know impressionistically. According to Gregg Kenney, a scientist with the New England Interstate Water Pollution Control Commission and the DEC Estuary Program, who provided much of the input for this article, the crabs also show no signs of unusual vulnerability to disease or parasites, which would indicate a stressed population.

Though we are deeply concerned about the trawl and dredge fishery in NY Harbor, the blue crab's story is good news – so far.

- Andy Mele
Executive Director

Crab numbers on the rise

Number of crabs collected annually on impingement screens of the Lovett and Bowline Point generating stations (Haverstraw Bay) per million cubic meters. (Courtesy of Gregg Kenney)



the larvae begin to look like crabs. They begin to swim like crabs too, and hitchhike on storms and tides as best they can toward fresh water. By August and September they are back in the river, 20-50 mm in size (measured along the carapace), and are beginning to show up on powerplant impingement screens.

Both males and females are highly mobile, and are caught in all types of habitat during the summer and fall months, but as the water becomes cold with the approach of winter most adult crabs migrate south into New York - New Jersey Harbor. The crabs gather en masse in the warmer and saltier southern waters of their home range, and sometimes even burrow into the sediment to wait for spring. When they are densely concentrated in their wintertime waters they become economically feasible for intensive mechanized harvesting.

(Below) One of a fleet of deep-water draggers trawling or dredging for blue crabs in New York Harbor.



Gregg Kenney