

Furry-clawed Asian crabs found in Delaware and Chesapeake Bays

June 4 2007



The "furry-looking" claws distinguish the Chinese mitten crab from native crabs. This Chinese mitten crab was caught in the upper Chesapeake Bay on May 18. Credit: Gregory Ruiz, Smithsonian Environmental Research Center

Chinese mitten crabs, first reported in the Chesapeake Bay, are more widespread than initially thought. Four crabs have now been caught in Delaware Bay during the last week of May 2007, and may occur in other waters of the U.S. east coast.

In total, seven adult male mitten crabs have been documented from the two bays since 2005. Prior to this, the potentially invasive species had never been recorded from coastal waters of the eastern United States.

The mitten crab is native to eastern Asia and has already invaded Europe

and the western United States, where it has established reproductive populations. The crab occurs in both freshwater and saltwater. Young crabs spend their lives in freshwater and migrate to saltwater estuaries for reproduction.

Named for the unusual thick fur-like coating on its claws, the mitten crab looks very different than native crabs and is easily recognized. It is listed as injurious wildlife under the Federal Lacey Act, due to its potential to cause ecological and economic damage.

“We don’t know the present status of this crab along the eastern U.S. coast” said Gregory Ruiz, senior scientist at the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center. “At the moment, it is not clear whether these crabs are reproducing or established in the Mid-Atlantic region, or whether the captured crabs are just a few individuals that originated elsewhere.” These crabs may have arrived in the ballast water of ships or through live trade.

Source: Smithsonian Environmental Research Center

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