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Blue Crabs By Sue Fenili

The scientific name (*Callinectes sapidus* Rathbun) of the blue crab aptly describes the species. It was derived from Latin and Greek. A literal translation might be the beautiful savory swimmer.

The blue crab is one of the most common marine invertebrates living in the Maurice River. The blue crab may be found in salt, fresh, and brackish waters but is most prevalent in brackish water, a mixture of fresh and salt waters. To those along the River, the males are referred to as Jimmies and the females are known as Belles.

As a scavenger, blue crabs eat edible wastes in the water. Crabs are also predators. They feed on clams, oyster and mussel beds, as well as some types of marsh grasses and seaweeds.

The blue crab may grow up to eight inches lengthwise across its hard shell, or carapace. The shell ranges in color from olive, brown, or reddish, to varying shades of blue and is made of chitin that is hardened with calcium. The compound eyes permit the crab to see even the smallest of movements in almost all directions. As a true crab, the blue crab has five pairs of legs. In the male, these legs have a bluish-grey color and are the source of the common name "blue crab". In the female, however, the tips of the legs are reddish-orange.

To some people blue crabs are as much a part of a summer vacation as sun bathing. Along the Maurice River recreational crabbing is a popular, relatively inexpensive, and a family oriented outdoor activity that usually provides a tasty and nutritious meal.

The blue crab supports a large recreational sport fishery as well as a tremendous commercial fishery. Many researchers, recreational and commercial fishermen, naturalists, and consumers hold the blue crab in very high esteem.

Recreational crabbing with single hand lines and collapsible traps does not require a license. The maximum harvest and/or possession limit of crabs is one bushel a day. All female crabs having eggs or spawn attached shall be immediately released.

Size restrictions for peeler or shedder crabs is 3 inches; soft crabs 3.5 inches and hard crabs 4.5 inches. All measurements are from point to point.

The prospect of a “crab supper” is a necessary component of the crabbing experience.