

Let's go on a crab hunt

Ask any child who visits a beach and the one creature that they really want to find is a crab.

Crabs are in a family called the crustaceans. Crustaceans include barnacles, crabs, lobsters, squat lobsters, prawns and shrimps.

Crustaceans do not have bones on the inside like us but have a shell or exoskeleton on the outside. They have two pairs of antennae or feelers and feeding mouthparts. They have jointed legs so they can move about and breathe through gills.

To allow the animal to grow the exoskeleton is shed once or twice a year. It takes a few weeks for the new shell to fully harden, so during this time, the crustacean will hide away as it is vulnerable to predation.

The four most common crabs to find off the North East coast are shore crabs, edible crabs, velvet swimming crabs and hermit crabs.

Crabs are usually found under seaweed, under overhangs or in rock pools under rocks.

Questions to ask:

- How many legs does a crab have?
- Is the crab a boy or a girl?
Turn the crab over and you will see a line making a triangular shape. That is its tail.
 - Male crabs have a narrow triangle for a tail.
 - Female crabs have a wide based triangle which it uses to help carry its eggs (berried)

Female shore crab carrying eggs



- What do crabs eat?
Mussels, sea snails, shrimp, smaller or soft shell crabs, seaweed.

Crabs commonly found along the North East coast:

Shore crab

Colour: dark green, to orange or brown

Shell: five teeth either side of the eye.



Edible crab

Colour: reddish brown with black tips to front pincers.

Often known as the pasty crab because of the piecrust edge to the shell.

It is the largest crab that you will probably see on the shore.



Velvet swimming crab

Colour: shell blue with a brown velvet covering.

Red eyes and bright blue lines on its legs. Flattened paddles on the back legs.

It is fast moving and quite aggressive. To defend itself it will rear up on its back legs, nippers raised and outstretched.



Hermit crab

Colour: orange to a reddish soft brown body.

Hermit crabs do not have their own shell so live in old empty shells.

The soft, body of the shell is coiled to fit the coils of a shell. As it grows and moults, it moves into another, larger shell.

The right hand pincer is usually larger than the left and is used to close the shell entrance when threatened.



Activities and fun things to do

- Go on a crab hunt. Look under seaweed, rocks and overhangs.
- Make crab masks
- Walk like a crab
- Draw a picture of a crab in the sand.
- Make a simple food chain

Books to share:

Clumsy crab: Ruth Galloway

Sharing a shell: Julia Donaldson and Lydia Monks