

The Atlantic blue crab is a keystone species in the Chesapeake Bay. They are not only important to the ecosystem and food chain, but to the region's economy as well. The Elizabeth River Project's Learning Barge is teaching local youth how sea level rise and flooding are effecting the blue crab and community through hands-on science, art, water quality, observation and more with Project Blue Crab!



Atlantic Blue Crab

Callinectes sapidus

Size: Adult males can grow to be 9 inches in length and weigh one to two pounds. **Lifespan:** 1 to 3 years

Habitat: The Atlantic blue crab is a bottom-dwelling crab that can be found in different parts of the Chesapeake Bay depending on age, gender, and season. However, they are most commonly found in brackish water and estuaries like the Elizabeth River. During the warmer months, you can find them holding onto the side of the Learning Barge!

Range: Along the east coast of the United States and in the Gulf of Mexico, and as far south as Argentina.

Diet: Blue crabs are referred to as "opportunistic feeders" meaning they will feed on almost anything they can get ahold of such as clams, oysters, mussels, smaller crustaceans, freshly dead fish, and plant and animal detritus. Blue crabs use their claws to crush and pry open shells.

Appearance: The blue crab is easily identified by its blue or olive green shell. They have 10 legs (decapods) with two paddle-like shaped swimming legs allowing them to swim sideways. Did you know that *Callinectes sapidus* means "beautiful swimmer"? Females have rounded abdomens known as "aprons" with red pincers. Males have aprons that resemble the Washington Monument and have blue or white pincers. Try making crab claws with your hands!

Predators: Large fish like croakers, red drum and striped bass, as well as great blue herons, sea turtles and of course, humans! A cooked blue crab turns bright red.

Communication: Crabs communicate by drumming or waving their pincers. *Click, click, clack!*

What can you do? Pollution, loss of habitat and overharvesting are the main threats to the Atlantic blue crab. When crabbing, follow local regulations and only keep the ones you are going to eat. You can also prevent excess nutrients from entering the River by using less fertilizer and scooping the poop.

On-Line Resources

Check out our Project Blue Crab program flier below!

<https://elizabethriver.org/sites/default/files/Spring%202020%20PBC%20Program%20Flier.pdf>

https://www.chesapeakebay.net/S=0/fieldguide/critter/blue_crab

https://www.chesapeakebay.net/issues/blue_crabs

<https://www.mrc.virginia.gov/regulations/recfish&crabrules.shtml>

<https://www.chesapeakequarterly.net/V11N2/side4/>



www.elizabethriver.org