

Chinese Mitten Crab

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Species Description

Scientific name: *Eriocheir sinensis*

AKA: Moon crab

Native to: China

Habitat: Tidal streams, rivers and estuaries. Adults migrate to estuaries and the sea to breed.

Chinese mitten crabs prefer to moult in freshwater but are unable to lay eggs at low salinities. Adults therefore migrate down rivers in the autumn to gather in estuaries to breed. Once eggs hatch in spring, juveniles and adults migrate back up the river. They can travel large distances and have been recorded up to 1,500km from the sea in their native China. They are also able to cross dry land and have been found in isolated freshwater ponds.

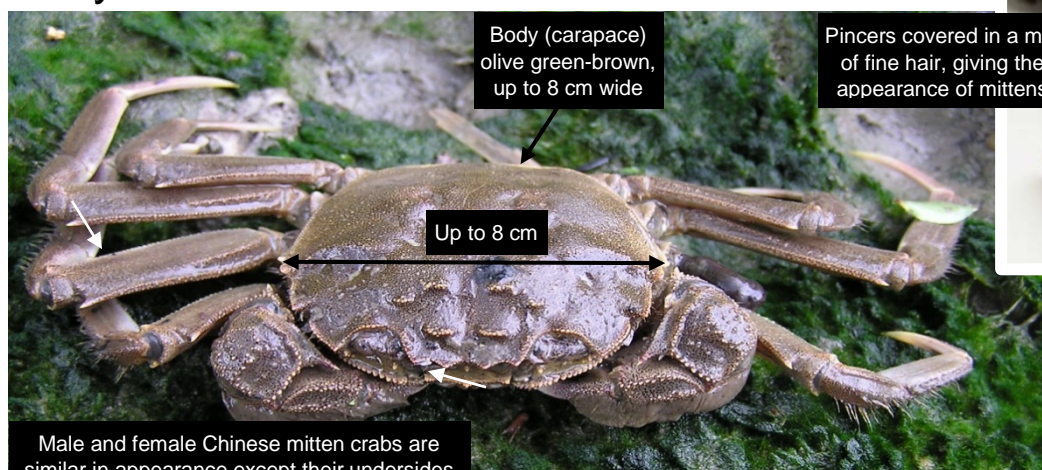
Although not currently present in Northern Ireland, Chinese mitten crab was first found in Ireland in Waterford Estuary. It is unclear at present how exactly the Chinese Mitten Crab arrived in Ireland. Likely vectors for introduction include ship ballast water and hull fouling. Other human mediated vectors such as the live food trade and smuggling may be possible as the mitten crab is considered a delicacy.

Chinese mitten crabs burrow into river banks, affecting their integrity and so can cause considerable damage. It has been placed on the IUCN 100 of the world's worst alien species list. They also are an intermediate host for the mammalian lung fluke *Paragonimus ringer*, known to infect humans.

Under the Invasive Alien Species (Enforcement and Permitting) Order (Northern Ireland) 2019 it is offence to intentionally keep; breed; transport to, from or within Northern Ireland, use or exchange Chinese mitten crab; or to release it into the environment.

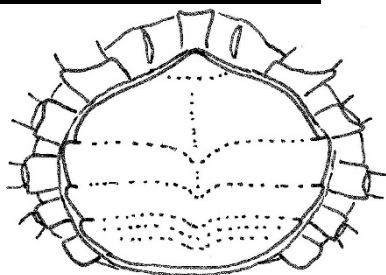


Key ID Features

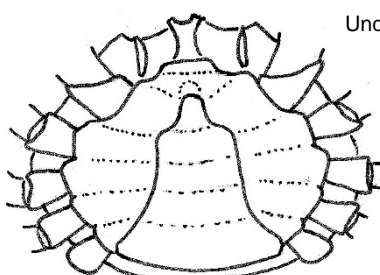


Male and female Chinese mitten crabs are similar in appearance except their undersides

Underside of female



Underside of male



Legs long and hairy



Report any sightings via; CEDaR Online Recording - <https://www2.habitas.org.uk/records/ISI>, iRecord app or Invasive Species Ireland website - <http://invasivespeciesireland.com/report-sighting>

Identification throughout the year

Chinese mitten crabs do not vary through the year. After adults gather to breed in estuaries, females carry the eggs overwinter until they hatch in spring.

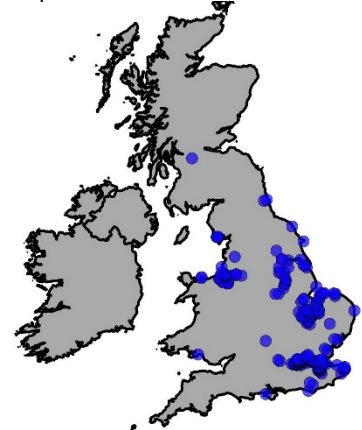
Field signs

They burrow into river banks causing holes about 3 cm in diameter. Dead bodies (carapaces) may be found though positive identification would require the mittens to be present.



Distribution

Currently not present in Northern Ireland.



Source: NBN Atlas – available at <https://species.nbnatlas.org/species/NHMSYS0001593547>
Check website for current distribution

There are no other freshwater crabs present in Britain. As adults migrate to estuaries in autumn there is a possibility of confusion with native marine crabs such as the shore crab. However none of our native crabs possess the distinctive hairs (mittens) on the claws.

Similar Species

Shore crab

Native
(*Carcinus maenas*)



References and further reading:

Gilbey, V, Attrill, MJ and Coleman, RA (2008) Juvenile Chinese mitten crabs (*Eriocheir sinensis*) in the Thames estuary: distribution, movement and possible inter- actions with the native crab *Carcinus maenas*. *Biological Invasions* 10 pp. 67-77
Photos from: FERA, Joseph Crofts, Richard Sands, Rob Brown.

Sustainability at the heart of a living, working, active landscape valued by everyone.

Adapted for Northern Ireland
Environment Agency 2020