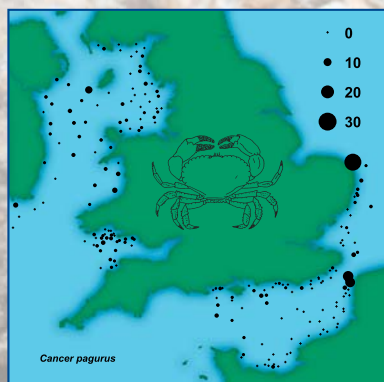


# DISTRIBUTION OF COMMERCIALY IMPORTANT CRABS (BRACHYURA) IN THE EASTERN ENGLISH CHANNEL, BRISTOL CHANNEL AND IRISH SEA

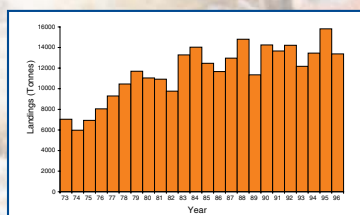
by J. R. Ellis and S. I. Rogers

## Introduction

Approximately 50 species of true crabs (Brachyura) occur in the inshore waters of the British Isles, and several of these are commercially important, including edible crab (*Cancer pagurus*) and spider crab (*Maja squinado*). Other species, including velvet swimming crab (*Necora puber*) and other large swimming crabs (*Liocarcinus* spp.) are of increasing commercial importance. This poster describes the biology of selected species and describes their distribution from beam-trawl surveys in the eastern English Channel, Bristol Channel and Irish Sea.



Distribution and relative abundance ( $\text{kg hr}^{-1}$ ) of *Cancer pagurus* in the eastern English Channel, Bristol Channel and Irish Sea.



Reported U.K. landings of edible crab *Cancer pagurus*.



The edible crab *Cancer pagurus* is the traditional target species in British crab fisheries (Photograph by D. Geiger)

## *Cancer pagurus*

A large bodied crab growing to 270 mm carapace width (CW) and 4 kg in weight. It is widespread on mixed, coarse substrates around the British Isles and from northern Norway to the Mediterranean.

Females mature at ca. 130 mm CW and undertake seasonal migrations for spawning. Egg bearing females, with up to a million eggs, may congregate in distinct areas. Whilst they incubate their eggs and spawn, they are not often captured in pots, resulting in an unequal sex ratio of commercially landed crabs at certain times of the year.

*C. pagurus* is the most important crab in U.K. fisheries and annual reported landings in recent years have been in the region of 10-15,000 tonnes.



The common spider crab *Maja squinado* is the largest spider crab in British coastal waters (Photograph by D. Geiger)

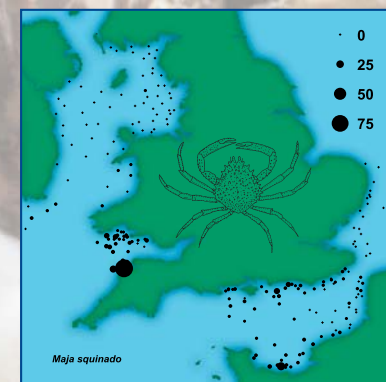
## *Maja squinado*

The largest spider crab in U.K. inshore waters, growing to 200 mm carapace length. Occurs on mixed substrata and coarse sand around most of the British Isles and south to the Mediterranean and Cape Verde Islands.

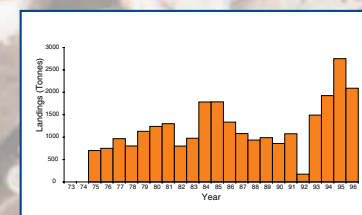
*M. squinado* segregate by sex and size at certain times of year. They migrate inshore during the spring and summer and return to deeper waters during the winter.

Females, which attain a smaller size than males, carry eggs (ca. 150,000) from May to September and have 1-2 broods per year.

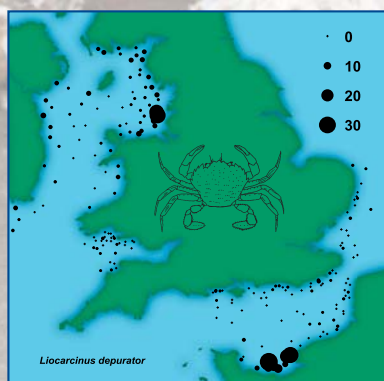
*M. squinado* are particularly common around the southern and western coasts of England and Wales where they are caught in pots and tangle nets. Annual reported U.K. landings have increased since the 1970's and, in recent years, have been in the region of 2,000 tonnes.



Distribution and relative abundance ( $\text{kg hr}^{-1}$ ) of *Maja squinado* in the eastern English Channel, Bristol Channel and Irish Sea.



Reported U.K. landings of spider crab *Maja squinado*.



Distribution and relative abundance ( $\text{kg hr}^{-1}$ ) of *Liocarcinus depurator* in the eastern English Channel, Bristol Channel and Irish Sea



The swimming crab *Liocarcinus holsatus* is one of the most abundant swimming crabs in British waters (Photograph by D. Geiger)

## Portunid crabs

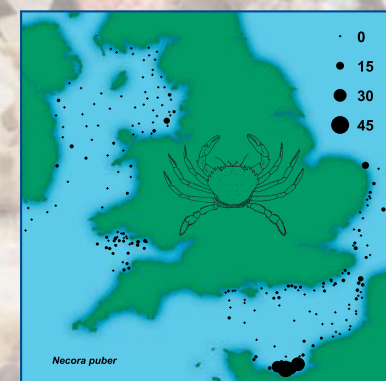
The family Portunidae contains several species, including *Liocarcinus* spp., *Necora puber* and *Carcinus maenas*. The latter species is used as bait in fisheries for the common whelk (*Buccinum undatum*).

*Necora puber* is one of the larger portunid crabs in UK waters and typically occurs in rocky areas, where they are an important by-catch in pots set for edible crabs. Large males often dominate these commercial catches.

Responding to a decline in the Spanish fishery, U.K. fisheries have started in western Scotland, the Orkneys, south-western England and Wales. The U.K. landed an estimated 4,000 tonnes in 1991.



The velvet swimming crab *Necora puber* normally occurs in more rocky areas (Photograph by D. Geiger)



Distribution and relative abundance ( $\text{kg hr}^{-1}$ ) of *Necora puber* in the eastern English Channel, Bristol Channel and Irish Sea