

# CHINESE MITTEN CRAB

*Eriocheir sinensis*



Department of  
Environmental  
Conservation

## What are Chinese mitten crabs?

Mitten crabs are aquatic crabs native to East Asia that were accidentally introduced into the United States through ballast water, the seawater pumped in and out of ships to maintain stability and other operating conditions. Although their ecological impacts are not yet fully known, they are considered invasive in the U.S. and have the potential to outcompete native species, such as blue crabs, for resources. They may also contribute to streambank erosion and the decline of wetlands due to their burrowing habits.

## Where have they been found?

Mitten crabs were first found along the east coast of the U.S. in 2005 in the Chesapeake Bay area and were later discovered in New York in 2007. They have been found in Oyster Bay (Nassau County), Huntington Bay (Suffolk County), Nissequogue River (Suffolk County), New York Harbor, and the Hudson River and several of its tributaries: Sawkill and Sparkill creeks (Dutchess County), Rondout Creek (Ulster County), Catskill Creek (Greene County), and Indian Kill (Dutchess County). This species migrates from freshwater to brackish/marine waters to spawn.

## What do they look like?

Mitten crabs can most easily be distinguished from our native crabs by their hairy “knuckles,” or claws, which are also white-tipped and the same size. Their shells can be up to 4 inches wide and light brown or olive colored, and they have eight sharply pointed legs that are about twice as long as their shell.

## How do they spread?

Mitten crabs have small eggs and larvae that can be moved from place to place in the ballast water of ocean-going ships, the water holding compartments of recreational watercraft, and bait buckets. They have been spread through live food markets and intentional releases, as well as accidental transport with other fisheries products such as oysters. Mitten crabs lack the swimmerets, or swimming legs, of other crab species and are considered “walking” crabs. They are much more likely than native aquatic crabs to leave the water and travel around barriers, so they can move hundreds of miles from where they were first introduced.

## What is being done?

There are no known controls for mitten crabs once they are introduced into a waterway. Containing existing populations and preventing new introductions are the only current management options. The Chinese mitten crab is a prohibited species under the New York State Part 575 of the Invasive Species Regulation, which means it is illegal to possess, sell, and transport live mitten crabs in the state.



A mitten crab caught in Yonkers in 2018



Mitten crab claws are hairy, white-tipped, and the same size.  
Photo: Erik Hanson, Portland St Univ., Bugwood.org



The hair on the claws is most easily seen while the crab is in the water or when completely dry.  
Photo: 2016 Rapid Response Plan for Management and Control of Chinese Mitten Crab, NY Sea Grant

DEC participates in the Mitten Crab Network, a partnership among several state, federal, and research organizations that is collecting data to determine the status, abundance, and distribution of this species. DEC has agreed to collect and hold specimens for genetic testing to determine the origin of individuals caught in the Hudson River.

## What can you do?

- Do not purchase or release mitten crabs.
- Clean, drain, and dry your boat and fishing equipment before and after each use. The New York State Part 576 Aquatic Invasive Species Spread Prevention Regulation now requires anyone using a public boat launch or fishing site to drain their boats and remove visible plant and animal material from their equipment before launching their boat and before leaving the site.
- When possible, use the following methods to fully decontaminate your equipment:
  - Clean the outside of the watercraft and trailer with high pressure (2500 psi) hot water (140°F) for 10 seconds.
  - Flush the inside of the motor and all compartments (bilge, live well, bait buckets, ballast, etc.) with hot water (140°F) for 2 minutes.
  - Soak fishing gear and equipment in hot water (140°F) for 2 minutes.
- Dump bait bucket water on land.

For more information regarding this protocol, visit [on.ny.gov/cleandraindry](https://on.ny.gov/cleandraindry).

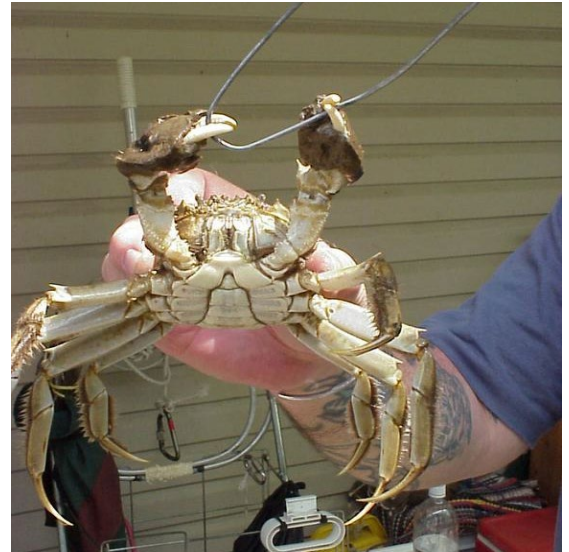
## If you encounter a mitten crab...

- DO NOT RELEASE IT.
- Take photos of the crab and closeups of its claws.
- Freeze it or preserve it in alcohol until you can make a report (someone may collect it for testing).
- Note how it was caught, where it was caught (GPS coordinates preferred) and the date.
- Contact the Invasive Species Coordination Unit (see below) within 48 hours of catching the crab.

For more information, visit [on.ny.gov/mittencrab](https://on.ny.gov/mittencrab).



Juvenile crabs are very small and can easily be transported in bait buckets and bilge water.  
Photo: Sarah H. Fernald, Hudson River National Estuarine Research Reserve



**DON'T PUT THEM BACK!!**  
Photo: David Kelch, Ohio SeaGrant, Bugwood.org

## CONTACT INFORMATION

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Updated October 11, 2024