

Chinese Mitten Crab

Species Description

Scientific name: *Eriocheir sinensis*
AKA: Moon crab, Cranc menigog (Welsh)
Native to: China
Habitat: Tidal streams, rivers and estuaries. Adults migrate to estuaries and the sea to breed.

The Chinese mitten crab was first recorded from the River Thames in 1935 having been discharged from the ballast tanks of ships. It is now well-established in the Rivers Thames, Humber, Medway, Tyne, Wharfe and Ouse.

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.

Its ability to travel large distances up river systems and cross dry land means that all waterbodies in Britain have the potential to be invaded.

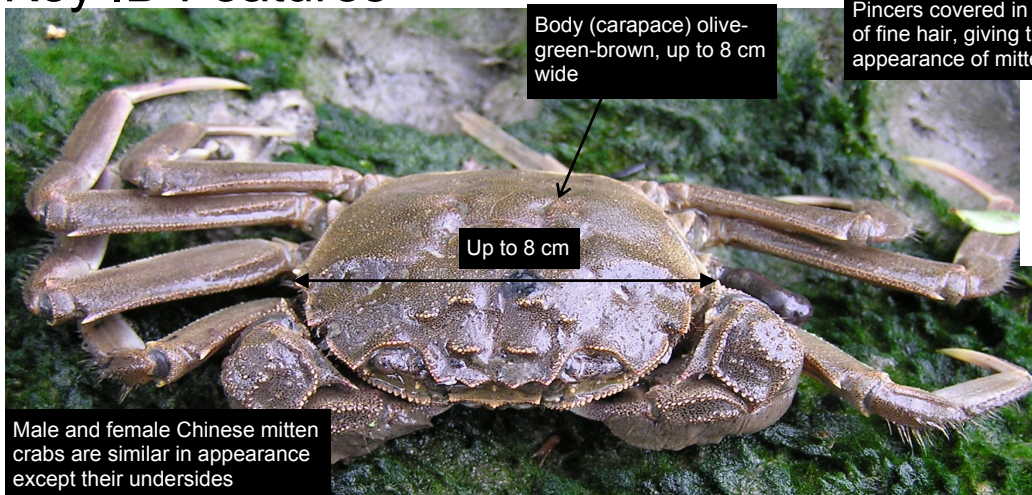
Chinese mitten crabs burrow into river banks, affecting their integrity and so can cause considerable damage. It has been placed on the IUCN 100 of the world's worst alien species list.

Chinese mitten crab is listed under Schedule 9 to the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 with respect to England and Wales. As such, it is an offence to release or allow the escape of this species into the wild.

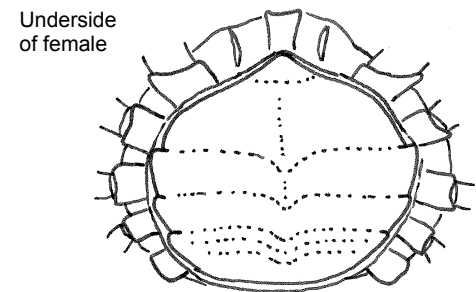
For details of legislation go to www.nonnativespecies.org/legislation.



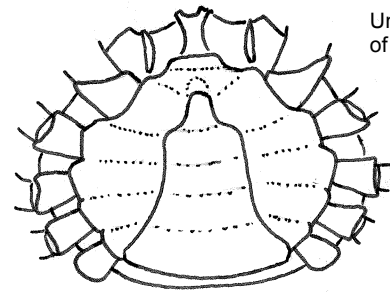
Key ID Features



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



Underside of female



Underside of male

Legs long and hairy

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

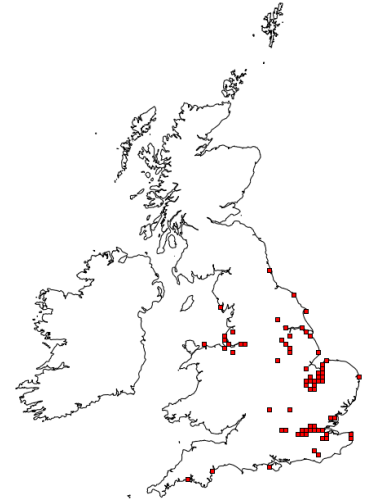
They burrow into river banks causing holes about 3 cm in diameter. Dead bodies (carapaces) may be found though positive identification would require the mittens to be present.



Distribution

Present in the Rivers Thames, Humber, Medway, Tyne, Wharfe and Ouse.

Source: NBN Gateway. 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 interactions with the native crab *Carcinus maenas*. *Biological Invasions* 10 pp. 67-77