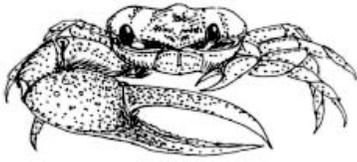


N.C. Plant and Animal Species Fact Sheets



Fiddler Crab (*Uca pugnax*)

Introduction

Although fishermen usually just think of fiddler crabs as bait, they occupy an important place in the food web of the estuary. There are three species that we find in N.C. This one is very common on mudflats. The others are *Uca minax* and *Uca pugilator*.

What do they look like?

Fiddler crabs are small crabs that are usually seen on tidal flats on near the high tide mark but they rely on gills and water for respiration. They have a hard exoskeleton that needs to be molted so that they may grow. The females have two small claws while the males have one small and one large claw.

How big are they?

Adult fiddler crabs are commonly 0.5-1.0 in. (1.27-2.54 cm.)

Where do they live?

Found on the tidal flats and in the saltmarshes they dig burrows in the soft sediment. They show little territoriality for their hiding burrows but they defend the special chambers they dig for their mate.

Who eats them?

Since they are low on the food chain many animals eat these crabs including fish, birds, crabs, and mammals.

What do they eat?

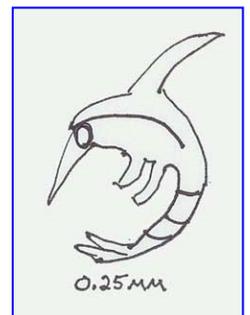
Fiddler crabs eat detritus mixed in with the soft sediments as well as algae and bacteria growing on the surface of the mud. Males and females eat different things. They ingest mud then digest the organic matter. The sand is dropped into a chamber underneath the crab and then is removed by the small claw of the crab. (Look for small sand balls near fiddler crab burrows.)

How do they mate?

When the tide period is correct, males stand outside their special chambers and wave their large claw (like a fiddler) to attract a mate. She will choose a burrow then shed her shell to mate.

What are the young like?

Like other crabs, the eggs are released on the outgoing tide. They become plankton as they move, through larval stages including the zoea stage. When they become crabs they will return to the beaches.



Zoea

EstuaryLive

www.EstuaryLive.org

North Carolina National Estuarine Research Reserve

www.ncnerr.org or tel. 252.728.2170

Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Program

<http://www.apnep.org/> or tel. 252.946.6481

Carolina Estuarine Reserve Foundation

www.cerf.us



Written by Bo & Colleen Sosnicki.
Illustrated by Debbie Pagliughi.

