

Helmet Crab

"He gets his name from the shape of his shell!"

Scientific name: *Telmessus cheirragonus*

Other Names: Hairy Helmet Crab, Horse Crab

Phylum: The helmet crab belongs to the phylum Arthropoda, which means "jointed legs."

Size: The helmet crab's body is wider than long - its shell up to 3 ¼" (8.3 cm) long and 4" (9.7cm) wide.

Description: See its helmet-shaped shell (also known as its carapace)? Notice the stiff bristly hairs all over its body. See its small claws with dark tips and the 6 large jagged spines on both edges of its shell? A young helmet crab has a unique greenish color, while older ones are greenish-yellow with red, orange, or brown markings.

Habitat: Since helmet crabs eat eelgrass, they usually live in fairly shallow water, in and around eelgrass beds. Sometimes they can be found in deep water, and around rocks covered with lots of seaweed.

Diet: Helmet crabs eat eelgrass, algae, snails, small bivalves (including clams and mussels) and worms.

Range: The helmet crab is found from the Bering Sea to California, but mostly from Puget Sound and north. It is also found from Siberia to Japan in the Western Pacific.

Relatives: The helmet crab is closely related to the Dungeness crab (*Cancer Magister*), the red crab (*Cancer productus*), and the graceful crab (*Cancer gracilis*) - all commonly found in eel grass beds.

Conservation Status: The helmet crab is often mistaken for the unwelcome invasive European green crab. Note the differences: the helmet crab is covered with stiff hairs and has 6 spines on each side of its eyes while the European green crab is smooth and has 5 spines.

Fun Facts:

- The helmet crab is very active, and can move *very* fast.
- Giant octopuses love to eat helmet crabs.
- The Helmet crab's scientific name comes from the Greek: *telm* (a swamp or pond); *essus* (small); *chir* (hand), and *gonia* (angled).

