**Chinese mitten crab**

*Eriocheir sinensis*

Order: *Decapoda*

Family: *Varunidae*

External appearance

The crab’s cephalothorax can reach a length of 20 cm, and its colour can range from dark greenish brown to reddish brown. The crab’s claws are shorter than its walking legs. Its most distinguishing features are the dark patches of setae (hair-like structures) on its claws.

Distribution

Chinese mitten crabs inhabit temperate and tropical waters between Vladivostok and southern China, including the coast of Japan, Taiwan, and Korea. They are found along the coast and in coastal lakes and estuaries. Chinese mitten crabs have been introduced to European coasts by ballast water from ships.

Diet

Omnivore – feeds on plants, algae, fish and invertebrates.

Development

In European rivers the crabs reach sexual maturity at 3–5 years of age, compared to 1–2 years of age on the Chinese coast. Eggs are laid once in a lifetime – in late summer in saltwater, and are attached under the body of the female. The female heads to the mouth of the river; there the larvae hatch and gradually move back to freshwater as they develop. A female crab can lay between a hundred thousand and a million eggs in a single batch.

Fishing

In Latvia, crabs damage fish nets and eat or gnaw the fish in them.

Interesting facts

Individuals have been found to have moved distances of up to 1400 km within their natural range. They contribute to the spread of other alien species – such as bivalves, nematodes and crustaceans – that live in the setae-covered claws of the Chinese mitten crab.