

Scientists ask for sightings after confirmation of first records in Great Britain of the Asian shore crab

Photographs of an unusual crab have been confirmed as the first mainland GB record of the Asian shore crab *Hemigrapsus sanguineus*. This crab is voracious and opportunistic with a broad diet and may therefore significantly affect native crab, and shellfish populations by disrupting the food web.

The reports were received just a few days before a scientific paper¹ was published predicting the most likely species to arrive in British waters and become invasive in the next 10 years.

The Asian shore crab and its close relative the brush-clawed crab (*Hemigrapsus takanoi*) were each identified as high risk species in the consensus based paper because of their potential threat to the environment. Both invasive species are now well established all along the southern English Channel coast (Opel Coast) of France and their arrival here was considered highly likely.

The first record was made by an angler in Glamorgan on the 3rd of May. Then, on the 14th May, a second specimen was reported in Herne Bay, Kent.

Jack Sewell from the Marine Biological Association said “Great Britain has an extensive coastline and observations from keen-eyed amateurs are vital in spotting new arrivals. We are grateful to Martin Burke and Dean Pearson for taking good photographs and sending the records to us. This means we have been able to alert conservation authorities. It is interesting that the two records were received in a short space of time from two locations so far apart. And we are keen to find out why.”

Paul Clark, crab specialist at the Natural History Museum, London added “I would like to see a live crab so if you do find a live specimen please make contact with me and I will arrange for it to be collected.” Contact details p.clark@nhm.ac.uk, tel. 0207 942 5564.

Native to the Northwest Pacific, this small crab (up to 4.5 cm across) has a distinctive square shaped shell (carapace) with three teeth on each side and distinctively banded legs. Females can produce around 50,000 eggs per clutch with 3-4 clutches per year. It was first recorded in Europe in 1999, scientists thinking it arrived as larvae in ballast water.

Natural Resources Wales will be surveying the area of the original record, to get a better understanding of the number of crabs in that area. NRW will also be working with colleagues across the United Kingdom to better understand the risk of spread.

Scientists are asking anyone finding this crab to take clear photographs of the crab and report the find at www.mba.ac.uk/recording

Ends

Notes for editors:

In 2009 the Asian shore crab was reported in the British Crown territory of Guernsey but it was not found on the GB mainland before these records. The Asian shore crab can be found in estuaries and coastal shores intertidally. It is typically found on more exposed rocky shores but also occurs in mud and sand under the shelter of rocks or shells, artificial structures, mussel beds and oyster reefs.

Further information on the Asian shore crab and other non-native species is available from the Non-Native Species Secretariat website: www.nonnativespecies.org

1. <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gcb.12603/pdf>

Images can be obtained from: Guy Baker

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The Marine Biological Association (MBA) is a professional body for marine scientists with some 1400 members world-wide. Since 1884 the MBA has established itself as a leading marine biological research organization contributing to the work of several Nobel Laureates and over 170 Fellows of the Royal Society. In recognition of its long and eminent history and its status within the field of marine biology, the MBA was awarded a Royal Charter in 2013.

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