

GEHR Watershed Minute #44

Blue Crab: (240 words)

The Atlantic **blue crab** is a crustacean found along the western edge of the Atlantic Ocean from Nova Scotia to Argentina, and has been abundant in the Great Egg Harbor Bay for centuries. People love to eat blue crabs, so commercial and recreational crab fishing is very important to the local population and visitors.

Natural predators of the adult blue crab include eels, striped bass, Atlantic croakers, cobia, drum fish, oyster toadfish, sandbar sharks, bull sharks, cownose rays, speckled/spotted trout, weakfish, catfish, gars, largemouth bass, loggerhead turtles, Atlantic Ridley turtles, herons and egrets, various diving ducks and raccoons.

The blue crab is an omnivore, eating both plants and animals. Adult blue crabs eat oysters, clams, mussels, dead and live fish, crabs, shrimp, snails, worms, organic debris, and aquatic plants such as roots, shoots and leaves of sea lettuce, eelgrass, ditch grass, and salt marsh grass.

Crabs are harvested with baited pots and traps, trotlines, hand lines, fishing poles and nets. They can deliver an extremely painful pinch and are noted for being particularly aggressive and difficult to handle safely. Even when out of the water, they will lunge towards movement they consider a threat.

To ensure the sustainability of future harvests, recreational and commercial blue crab fishing is subject to size and possession limits and seasonal restrictions. The recreational rules require a 4 ½ inch size minimum, one bushel per day catch limit, and a season between March 15 and November 30.