

Coconut Crab

Birgus latro



The largest of the terrestrial crabs and in general among the arthropods: not being constrained by the confines of living in a shell allows this species to grow larger.

-up to 60 cm of length

-up to 4 kg

-Leg span can reach 1 m

Males are larger than females.

10 pairs of legs: last pair of legs is very small and used by females to tend their legs.

The left cheliped leg is larger than the right one.

Life cycle: they mate from May to September; the female holds the fertilized eggs for few months before releasing the eggs in the ocean: normally in the night from rocky shore and during the high tide. After 2/3 weeks of planktonic life, it metamorphoses and seeks in a gastropod shell and move onto land where it buries in the substrate to molt to the first juvenile abandoning the shell forever. The adult lives in burrows, holes and cavities in root systems.

Forages by night, feeds on plants and coconuts but also scavenges on carcasses or injured animals (turtles eggs and hatchlings). It has a very good sense of smell comparable to the insects' one.

They breathe through branchiostegal lungs, instead of gills.

They cannot swim and they drown if immersed in water.

Sexual maturity at the age of 5, life span may be over 60 years.

They don't have natural predators apart from other coconut crabs and people.

Distribution: coconut crab is an indo-pacific species, which is present nowadays only on islands. It has disappeared from mainland Australia and Madagascar, and in many other minor islands.

The abundance of this species is unclear. One fact is very clear: this species disappeared from many areas of its former distribution because considered a delicacy by local populations.

On Fanjove Island exists a natural population, whose dimension and status is unknown: for this reason we started a collection of data where measurements and individual marking are recorded.

