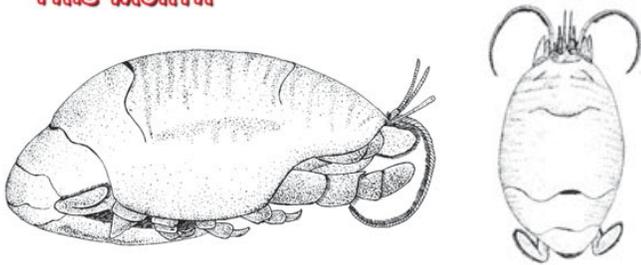


This Month



Mole Crab

Colloquial Nickname: Beach flea, sand crab

Scientific name: *Emerita talpoida*

Field Markings: Pale, grayish-tan or sand-colored.
Size: 3 inches long, 1 inch wide. The female is larger than the male.
Habitat: Open sandy beaches, in the surf zone.
Seasonal Appearance: Year-round

DISTINGUISHING FEATURES AND BEHAVIORS

The mole crab is an egg-shaped crustacean with a smooth, convex carapace. An atypical crab shape, this crab's abdomen is broad in the front and tapers to its tail, which has a pair of forked, leaflike appendages. A long, spearlike tailpiece folds under the body, and a pair of dark eyes sits atop long, thin eyestalks.

Unlike most crabs and lobsters, the mole crab is somewhat defenseless, having no appendages to bait, sting or threaten predators. Instead, its appendages are better adapted for digging. Its Latin name *talpoida* means "molelike," an appropriate name to describe its excellent digging abilities.

The mole crab has two highly functional pairs of antennae, both covered with fine, featherlike hairs. One pair is used for breathing, the other for feeding.

Mole crabs bury themselves in the sand, anchoring their bodies in place with their tail plates and extending their antennae. The breathing antennae form a small funnel that takes oxygenated water and filters sand grains away from its gills. The feeding antennae unfold into the water, trapping phytoplankton in their fine hairs. When its hairs are full of food, the mole crab ingests the phytoplankton by wiping the antennae across its mouth.

Mole crabs inhabit the shoreline where breaking waves crash,

often leaving them exposed. When this happens, the crab digs furiously into the sand to seek cover, escaping the next wave. The crabs adapt to the tidal cycle, migrating up and down with the high and low tides, always burrowing where the waves break. They are free swimming in the winter when both sexes move into deeper waters.



Mole crab (*Emerita Talpoida*) top and bottom views



RELATIONSHIP TO PEOPLE

Mole crabs are favored bait for striped bass fishing. They are easy to capture where the waves break along the shoreline by digging a few inches into the sand in the spot where the crab was last seen burying itself.

HOW TO GET YOUR OWN COPY

RISAA members can purchase their own copy of *The Uncommon Guide To Common Life on Narragansett Bay* for \$15 from the RISAA Merchandise Committee. Stop by the committee table at any monthly RISAA meeting.



Traditions only last if they are pass down to the next generation

CHOOSE RELIABLE. REPOWER WITH THE EXPERTS!

ocean house marina

YAMAHA

GARMIN, Sweetwater, Harken, REGULATOR, AquaPatio, MARITIME, Spirit BOATS, Sanpan, Rositar

WWW.OCEANHOUSEMARINA.COM | GO TOWN DOCK RD | CHARLESTOWN, RI 02813 | 401-364-6040