

Ocean Commotion 2013



Shrimp

Shrimp are crustaceans – like crabs, lobsters, and crawfish. Crustaceans are animals that have hard exoskeletons, jointed legs and segmented bodies. Shrimp are found in freshwater and saltwater, and usually live on muddy or sandy bottoms. They are omnivorous, meaning they eat both plants and animals. Their diet consists mainly of algae, tiny fish, plankton and plant particles that are suspended in the water. Shrimp are prey to many other species, including fish, other crustaceans, sea birds, whales, dolphins and humans.

Shrimp are decapods – meaning they have 10 walking legs. They have long, whip-like antenna and fan-shaped tails, and most shrimp swim backwards. A shrimp's heart is in its head. They are invertebrates with transparent exoskeletons; these exoskeletons are shed and regrown as the shrimp gets bigger. A shrimp's body is protected by a hard shell called a carapace. Shrimp have sharp beaks called rostrums that they use for protection and stabilization.

The average life span of a shrimp in the wild is 13 months, though some live as long as 5 years. Almost all shrimp are between 1 and 8 inches when they are fully grown, though some shrimp (like the white shrimp) can grow to 11 inches or more. Shrimp adapt quickly to different water conditions, allowing them to thrive in all the world's oceans.

Each female shrimp lays thousands of eggs, which can hatch as soon as 24 hours later. Baby shrimp become part of the plankton in the water until they are big enough to hunt in groups. Currents from deep water carry baby shrimp into coastal estuaries, where they mature.

Shrimp are the most important international fisheries product, and the number one seafood product in the United States. Shrimp are a dietary staple in many cultures all around the world. There are more than 2,000 species of shrimp, but only about 20 species are important in the commercial seafood industry. One-third of the shrimp produced around the world are grown on farms, but all of the shrimp that come from the Gulf of Mexico are wild-caught in trawl nets. Trawl nets are cone-shaped nets that drag along the bottom of the ocean, collecting shrimp and small fish.

There are five species of shrimp that are caught as seafood in the Gulf of Mexico. These include brown shrimp (*Penaeus aztecus*), white shrimp (*Litopenaeus setiferus*), pink shrimp (*Farfantapenaeus duorarum*), royal red shrimp (*Pleoticus robustus*), and rock shrimp (*Sicyonia brevirostris*). Shrimp come in several different colors (brown, white, pink, red, green and gray), and many can change colors to match their environment. Since each species is in abundance at different times of the year, shrimp are available year-round.

Over 5 million metric tons (or 11 billion pounds) of shrimp are harvested every year worldwide; 400 million pounds of these are caught in the United States. The majority of shrimp caught in this country come from Texas and Louisiana, including around 97% of the U.S. brown shrimp landings.