



COASTAL NEWS

This information is provided by Delaware Sea Grant in cooperation with the *Cape Gazette*.

Horseshoe Crabs: Creatures from the Past

Horseshoe crabs are among the world's oldest and most fascinating creatures. They inhabited Earth for at least 100 million years before the dinosaurs!

The largest concentration of horseshoe crabs in the world is found in Delaware Bay and nearby coastal waters. Each spring, hundreds of thousands of horseshoe crabs appear on sandy beaches along Delaware Bay and Delaware's Inland Bays to spawn.

Here are a few things to consider if you encounter horseshoe crabs on the beach:

- Despite its threatening appearance, the horseshoe crab is harmless. Its claws aren't sharp and its long spike-like tail is not poisonous.
- If a horseshoe crab is flipped over and cannot right itself, it is vulnerable to predators. If you want to give an overturned crab a helping hand, the correct way to pick up the animal is by its helmet-like shell. Never lift the horseshoe crab by its tail because you might injure it.
- Be sure to wash your hands after handling a horseshoe crab or any other wildlife.

Underside view of a horseshoe crab



The most secure way to hold a horseshoe crab is by cradling its helmet-like shell in your hands, similar to how you would carry a full soup bowl.

Egg cluster



A female adult horseshoe crab can lay 4,000 eggs in each nest and up to 90,000 eggs in a single year!



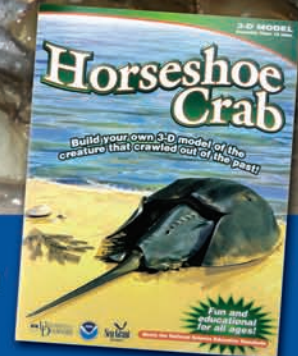
Peak spawning occurs around the full and new moons in May and June, during evening high tides. Horseshoe crabs form clusters along the edge of the water with as many as 12 males grouped around one female.



Chris Bennett

The spring migration of red knots and many other shorebird species coincides with the horseshoe crab spawning season. Shorebirds feast on the nutritious horseshoe crab eggs.

Scientists and wildlife managers are concerned that declining horseshoe crab populations may pose a problem for shorebirds. Recent counts of some migratory shorebirds have shown alarming population decreases. The red knot is now a candidate for protection under the Endangered Species Act.



Get Your Own Horseshoe Crab Model!

Order a three-dimensional model of Delaware's state marine animal, which children or adults can assemble in 15 minutes. Models are \$1 each. Call 302-831-8083.

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