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What crab is it?

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What crab is it?

By **RY Buendia**

The mud crab *Scylla* spp. of the Portunidae family is widely distributed throughout the Indo-west Pacific region. They are considered an important seafood item due to their esteemed delicacy, medicinal and high market value (Kathirvel *et al.* 1997). Recent studies showed that there is a large market for mud crab worldwide (Globefish 1995; Austrade 1996). In the Philippines, the Department of Science and Technology included mud crab in its list of "Export Winners" in aquaculture (Fortes 1999).

Locally known as king crab or giant crab, the *Scylla serrata* species is preferred by crab farmers. "They grow bigger and faster, some reaching 1 kg in just six months," says Avelino Triño, a crab expert at SEAFDEC. They grow well in ponds if fed regularly. They seldom burrow, avoiding damage to dikes. Although harvesting is tedious, mud crab can be transported live up to 7 days if kept moist.

Currently, one problem faced by the industry is identifying the real *Scylla serrata* species. For the past years, all the other species were mistaken as *Scylla serrata* in the aquaculture industry and even in the scientific publications (Fortes 1997). Most recently studies revealed that there are four species of *Scylla* (see box). Farmers buying crablets are often confused of the identification of the various species and this leads to marketing problems after harvesting as prices for each species vary.

The SEAFDEC Aquaculture Department has an on-going study in crablet identification for all *Scylla* species. Dr. Emilia Quintio, project leader, hopes this will help the researchers and the fishfarmers in their acquisition of wild stock for research and grow-out. Uniformity in size, weight and color will also result in good research and market.

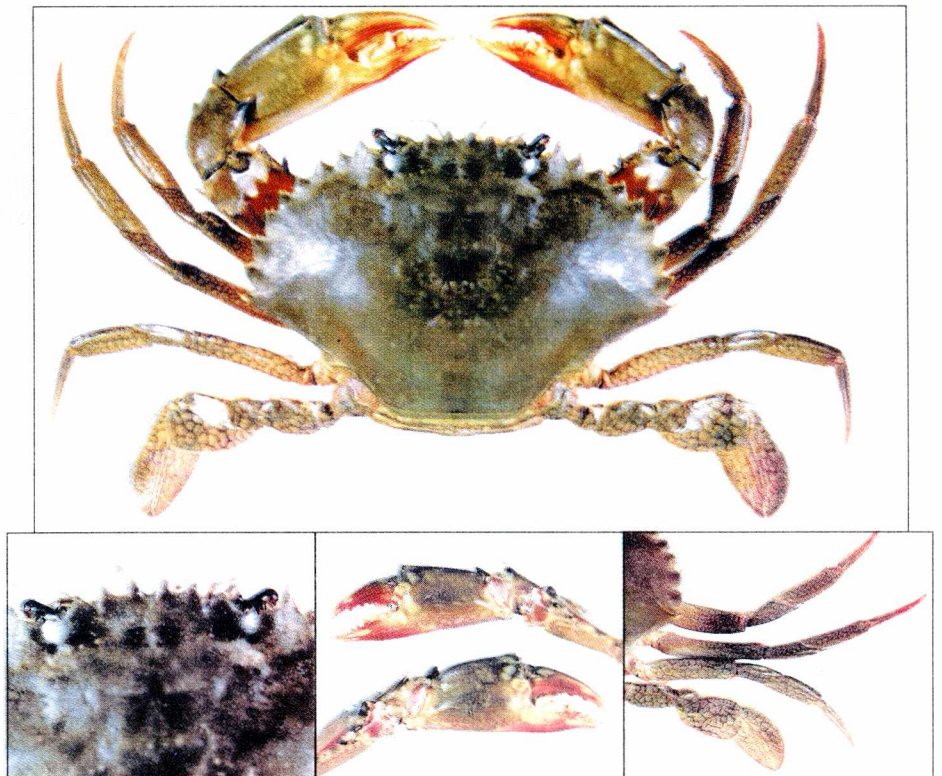
Mud crab classification

First reported as *Cancer serratus* (Forsk. 1755), *Portunus tranquebaricus* (Fabricius 1793), and *Scylla olivacea* (Herbst 1796), de Haan in 1833 choose the name *Scylla serrata* after a mythical Greek sea monster Scylla who lived in a cave (BOBP 1992). A century later, Estampador in 1949 identified three species and a subspecies. This, however, was revised by Keenan *et al.* in 1998. Below is a comparison (Fortes 1999):

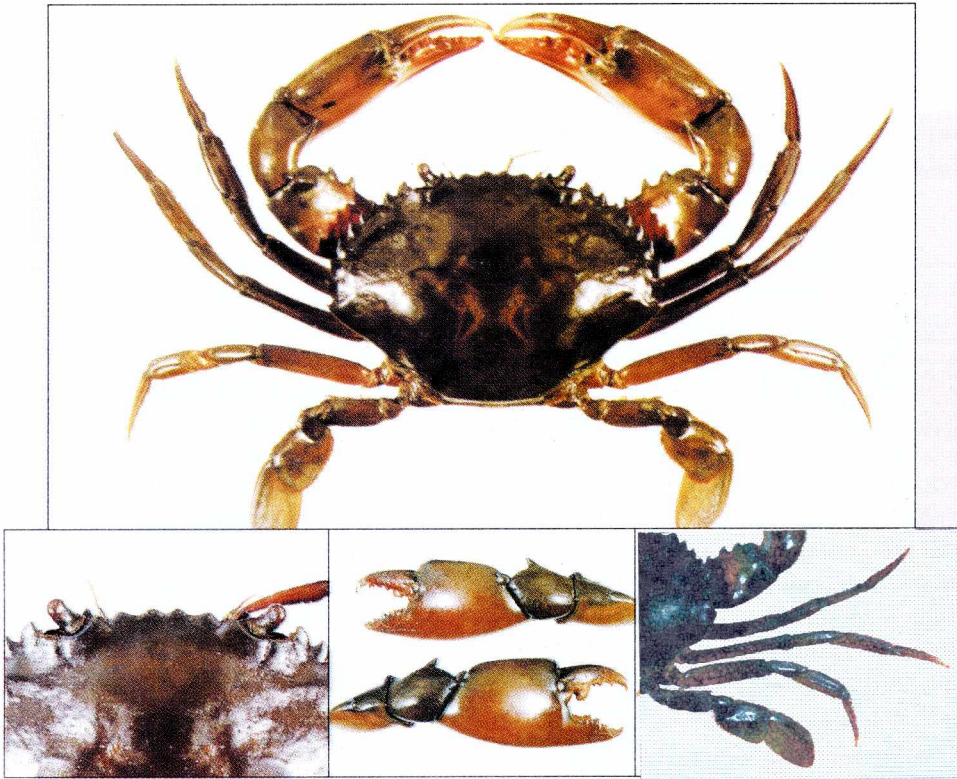
Estampador (1949a)	Keenan <i>et al.</i> (1998)
<i>S. serrata</i>	<i>S. olivacea</i>
<i>S. oceanica</i>	<i>S. serrata</i>
<i>S. serrata</i> var. <i>paramamosain</i>	<i>S. paramamosain</i>
<i>S. tranquebarica</i>	<i>S. tranquebarica</i>

The following photos show the four species as identified by Keenan *et al.* (1998). Note the differences in the frontal lobe area, spines on the chelipeds or claws, and polygonal patterns in the swimming and walking legs.

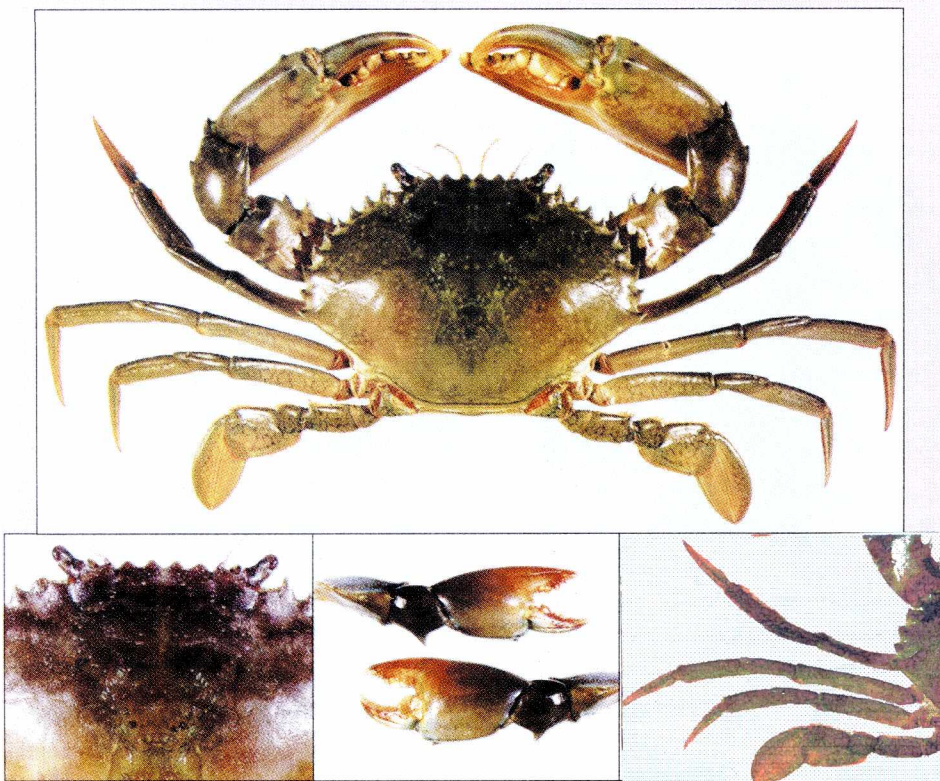
Scylla serrata



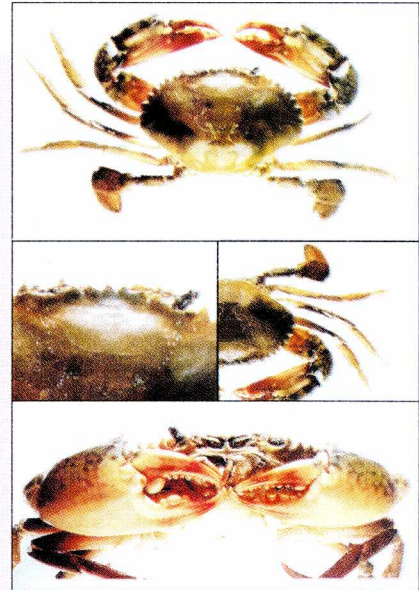
Scylla olivacea



Scylla tranquebarica



Scylla paramamosain



Keenan 1999

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