



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

UNITED STATES FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release MARCH 19, 1958

UNITED STATES FISHERY BIOLOGISTS PROBE KING CRAB

Literally foot by foot the king crab utilizes its six walking legs to wend its way here and there in its favorite habitat in the Bering Sea and in other places in the western Pacific Ocean where the water is from 30 to 70 fathoms deep.

Records in the Department of the Interior show that this crustacean has shuffled along the ocean floor as much as 300 miles. Migrations of 50 to 100 miles are common. Recently the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries, United States Fish and Wildlife Service, reported that one king crab was taken 122 miles, from point of release, one year and ten days after tagging. The distance covered by side trips is not known.

The king crab, a walker and not a swimmer, is one of Alaska's many contributions to the tables of many nations. In the eastern Bering Sea, which is the center of American interest and activity there are an estimated 20 million king crabs, commercial size. This estimate is based upon a sampling project at 77 fishing stations covering an area of 31,000 square miles of ocean north of the Alaska peninsula. The survey was made in July 1957. "Commercial size" is not less than six and three-quarters inches across the top of the body. The king crab often measures as much as five feet from leg tip to leg tip; it weighs usually from seven to ten pounds with a record weight of 22.3 pounds.

While its tastiness has long been known to the American consumer it is only in recent years that American fishermen have made systematic attempts to harvest the resource. Much of harvesting can be done in "off seasons" when fishing boats are not otherwise engaged. In recent years, also, the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries has shown an increasing interest in this crustacean.

Japan has been harvesting the king crab for a long time. With American fishermen now becoming active in the harvest, the advantage of joint conservation practices is becoming apparent. Hence, the United States section of the International North Pacific Fisheries Commission has asked the Bureau of Commercial

Fisheries to make as thorough a study as possible of this resource. Through the Saltonstall-Kennedy Act for the improvement of the domestic commercial fishing industry, \$31,000 has been made available for the current research program, in addition to \$39,000 of regularly appropriated funds.

If the resource is to be managed properly--that is if maximum sustained yield is to be realized--the researchers must accumulate a considerable amount of data on the life history of that shellfish--its spawning habits and areas, its natural enemies, conditions of optimum development, strong and weak spots in the life cycle, the rate of growth, its habitat and numerous other things. The basis of such a study depends upon being able to identify individual members of the group to be studied.

One of the toughest problems which the research biologists working on the king crab have been asked to solve is the matter of tagging. Because the king crab periodically just walks out of his old shell a tag attached to the shell sooner or later is separated from the crab.

But the biologists finally found a spot under the shell--in an area which in humans might be called the sacroiliac--where a "spaghetti" or ribbon tag can be permanently attached. Now the king of the crabs is under the rather thorough observation of the research biologists. Last year 15,570 king crabs were tagged. Information on their recapture is secured from both Japanese and American fishermen.

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