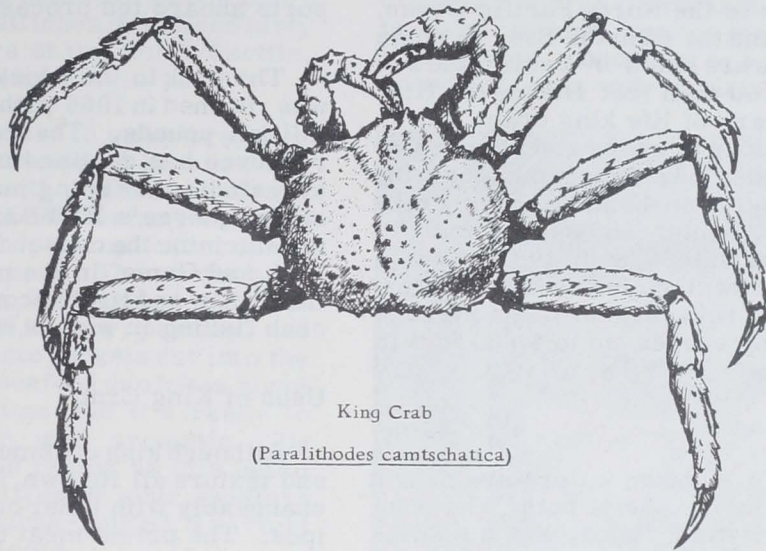


FOOD FISH FACTS



King Crab
(*Paralithodes camtschatica*)

King crabs, one of Alaska's most valuable resources, are tremendous fellows. Although the average size is around 11 pounds, fishermen have taken king crabs with a tip-to-tip span of almost six feet and weighing up to 24 pounds.

The scientific name of the king crab aptly describes its appearance. Taken from the Greek, *para* means closely resembling, *lithodes* means stone, and refers to its heavy, rough shell which closely resembles a stone. *Camtschatica* is taken from the Kamchatka Peninsula which extends into the Bering Sea where many king crabs are found.

Description

All crabs have a hard shell and five pairs of jointed legs. The first pair of legs is always equipped with pincers. The hard shell, or exoskeleton, limits the size of the crab and, in order to grow, it periodically sheds the hard outer covering after forming a new, soft exoskeleton. This process is called molting. In the soft-shell stage, crabs are particularly vulnerable to attack from natural enemies and from other crabs. The length

of time between molts and the number of times that a crab molts varies with the species and is also affected by temperature, available food supply, and maximum growth.

Another interesting fact about crabs is their ability to drop an injured leg and replace it by growing a new one. This regeneration process is called autotomy and can be continued until the crab no longer molts. The crab, through a reflex action, severs the leg at a preformed breakage point. In this way, the leg is dropped at a point where the possibilities for healing and regrowth are greatest. This process also allows the crab to escape when grasped by an enemy.

In most crabs the first pair of legs are the biggest and the pincers are large. In king crabs the second, third, and fourth pairs of legs are larger than the first pair. At first glance, king crabs may appear to have only four pairs of legs. There is a fifth pair, however, small, bent upward, and often inserted under the shell. These differences, along with the rough, heavy shell and the large size, are some of the distinctive features of the king crab family.

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