



Photo: Chris Taylor, Illinois Histroty Survey, Bugwood.org

RED SWAMP CRAYFISH

Red Swamp Crayfish (RSC), *Procambarus clarkii*, is native to the southern U.S., where it is commercially farmed for food and supports a lucrative industry. Angler bait discard and the aquarium trade contributed to the northward spread. RSC also escaped from local aquaculture facilities and were released following classroom use in public schools. This aggressive invasive now occurs in all three Delaware counties in a variety of habitats: piedmont streams, public ponds, and stormwater basins. Residents of several neighborhoods found RSC on lawns, under porches, and in swimming pools.

Typically dark red, with bright red rows of bumps (tubercles) on the front claws. The claws and head are elongate and the rostrum is triangular. The areola (a space on the dorsal surface where the two halves of the carapace meet) is linear with no gap. They usually have a dark line (a vein) on the underside of their tail (abdomen). Juveniles are difficult to distinguish from some other crayfish species because they are not red. RSC have a 'wondering phase' with short peaks of high speed movement and an 'immobile stage' where they hide in their burrows except when coming out to forage.

Like other species of crayfish, RSC feed on a variety of aquatic plants, benthic invertebrates, fish eggs, small fish, and detritus. What sets RSC apart is aggressive behavior which allows them to out-compete and displace native crayfish, dragonfly nymphs, and amphibians. They tend to be destructive when digging borrows in aquatic plant beds and cause erosion of river banks. RSC can also carry parasites and diseases that impact native crayfish species.

Members of the public are key to preventing the invasion and spread of aquatic invasive species. Reports can be submitted via: DNRECFisheries@delaware.gov or call (302) 735-8654 or (302) 739-9914. Please include date, specific location, and a photo to confirm species identification.



Photo credit: B. Dant

QUICK FACTS

- Advertised by aquarium trade as a 'freshwater lobster'
- One of the main ingredients in a southern 'crawfish boil'
- Tolerant of a wide range of site conditions
- Mature in a few months, but live ~2-5 years
- Burrows may extend nearly 3' deep; used for protection and spawning

