



COMMONWEALTH of the  
NORTHERN MARIANAS ISLANDS



PHOTOS BY SCOTT VOGT



- Farallon de Pajaros (Uracas)
- Maug
- Asuncion
- Agrihan
- Pagan
- Alamagan
- Guguan
- Sarigan
- Anatahan
- Farallon de Medinilla
- Saipan
- Tintan
- Aguiguan
- Rota

\* Distribution in the CNMI

GAME SPECIES

# COCONUT CRAB

Ayuyu  
*Chamorro*

Iyāf  
*Carolinian*

## IDENTIFICATION

The Coconut crab (*Birgus latro*) is the largest land crab in the world. Adults can reach a leg span of up to three feet (90cm). Adult Coconut crabs have a bluish hue on their exoskeleton that is very distinctive. Coconut crabs have gills that they keep moist by dipping their back legs into pools of water.

## HABITAT and FEEDING

Coconut crabs live in many diverse forest types including native forests, secondary forests and tangantangan stands. They dig holes in which they hide during the day. At night they come out to search for food. They are scavengers that feed on a variety of fruits, decaying plant matter and small or dead animals. Their favorite food, of course, is coconut. They have large, strong claws that can rip the husk from the coconut, crack the shell and get meat from the inside of the nut.

## REPRODUCTION

Coconut crabs have a unique life cycle. They begin their life in the sea and live on land as adults. Adult females mate with males on land and then travel to the sea to lay their eggs. The eggs hatch into tiny larvae that drift with the currents for several weeks before settling to the bottom where they transform into tiny crabs. They then climb into a seashell and crawl up on the beach. At this time, they look

very much like hermit crabs. Soon they leave their seashell and depend on their hard shell for protection.

## THREATS and CONSERVATION

Coconut crabs are threatened by attacks from introduced animals, overharvesting and deforestation. Full grown coconut crabs have no enemies other than humans. The delicious Coconut crab is considered a game species in the CNMI and is a local delicacy. The young are eaten by introduced predators such as rats, wild pigs, dogs, and monitor lizards. Coconut crabs grow very slowly and take a long time to reach sexual maturity. Regulations have been developed to avoid overharvesting.

A license is required to hunt Coconut crabs and there is a size limitation. During the hunting season, a Coconut crab can only be taken if it is over three inches (7.5cm) across the back shell (carapace). A female crab, regardless of size, may not be taken when it is carrying eggs beneath the abdomen (berried).

The only legal means of taking Coconut crabs is by hand. The bag limit is five with a total season limit of ten per person. The sale of Coconut crabs captured in the CNMI is prohibited. The preserving or mounting of Coconut crabs for display purposes or the sale of such crabs within the CNMI is also prohibited.

## ROBBER CRAB!

This crab is attracted to shiny objects and has been known to run off with steel pots and other trinkets! Outside pets have to guard their food!

**FACTOID!**



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