

King Crab

According to the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, the king crab is not a true crab like the tanner or dungeness crabs, but are more closely related to the hermit crab.

And even then the king is different. The king's abdomen is pressed under their bodies and covered with a series of protective plates and their legs are jointed to fold behind the body instead of being jointed forward as the true crabs, the tanner and dungeness.

In a 15 year lifetime, a king crab can grow up to 24 pounds, but commercially caught crabs average about seven pounds, and those that are 8 to 9 years old measure about three feet with legs spread out.

In late winter, king crabs migrate from the deeper waters to shallower waters where mature females molt and are mated. This time usually follows safe ice conditions for hand line crabbing from many communities in Norton Sound northward.

Following mating the crabs move back to deeper water and

feed throughout the summer, fall and early winter months.

Female crabs carry up to 240,000 fertilized eggs for a year in their brood pouches. The eggs hatch into a free-swimming larvae and drift with the tides and ocean currents for 40 to 60 days and then settle to the bottom. They lose their ability to swim or leave the ocean bottom at this time. They form "pods" by piling on top of each other for protection. These pods may number to several thousand crabs.

King crabs molt as they outgrow their hard outer shell. The legs and body are spiny, which gives them protection from the fish that prey on them.