**Pacifastacus leniusculus**

**System:** Freshwater

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**Common name**
Pacific crayfish (English), Californian crayfish (English), signal crayfish (English)

**Synonym**
Astacus leniusculus, Dana, 1852
Potamobius leniusculus, Ortmann, 1902
Pacifastacus leniusculus, Bott, 1950

**Similar species**
Astacus astacus

**Summary**
Pacifastacus leniusculus is a large, hardy cool temperate freshwater crayfish that is found in rivers and lakes. It is endemic to northwestern USA and southwestern Canada, from where it was introduced into more southerly states, as well as into Europe and Japan. Pacifastacus leniusculus is an aggressive competitor and has been responsible for displacing indigenous crayfish species wherever it has been introduced. In addition, it acts as a vector for the crayfish plague fungus, Aphanomyces astaci, to which all non-North American crayfish are susceptible, but to which it is relatively immune. Pacifastacus leniusculus is a large, relatively fast-growing species with high fecundity. Consequently, it has proved a good aquacultural species and supports capture fisheries in the western USA and Europe, particularly in Finland and Sweden.

**Species Description**
The cephalothorax is smooth with two pairs of post-orbital ridges, the anterior pair with an apical spine; and no spines on shoulders of the carapace behind cervical groove; the areola between branchiocardiac grooves is obvious. The rostrum sides are smooth and more or less parallel until the apex; the acumen is very pointed with prominent shoulders; and a simple median carina down whole length. Its claws are robust and smooth on both surfaces, the underside is red in colour; with a single tubercle on the inner side of the fixed finger; and a white-turquoise patch on top of the junction of fixed and moveable fingers; adult males are massive either lengthways or in width. Males are up to 16cm in length from tip of rostrum to end of telson, females up to 12cm; much larger individuals have been recorded, i.e. 95mm carapace length. The weight is typically 60 and 110g at 50 and 70mm carapace length. Its colour bluish-brown to reddish-brown, occasionally light- to dark-brown (David Holdich., pers. comm., 2005).

[view this species on IUCN Red List]
Lifecycle Stages

*Pacifastacus leniusculus* has a typical life cycle of a member of the crayfish family Astacidae, and which is therefore very similar to that of indigenous European crayfish. The eggs hatch into miniature crayfish that stay with the mother for three stages, the third stage gradually becoming more and more independent of the mother. Juveniles undergo as many as 11 moults during their first year, but by age 3 this is reduced to two moults per year, and by age 4 onwards to one moult per year (Lewis, 2002).

**Uses**

Commercially harvested in the western USA, mainly in Washington and Oregon States, although a larger harvest is obtained from the introduced population in the Sacramento River (Lewis, 2002). It was originally hoped that stocking *P. leniusculus* into European waters would revive catches of crayfish to their pre-plague levels, particularly in Sweden and Finland (Skurdal et al. 1999), this has not proved to be the case. In Sweden the catch in 1996 was 265 tonnes (compared to 52 for *A. astacus*) and that cultured amounted to 42 tonnes (compared to 12 for *A. astacus*). However, the Finnish catch of *P. leniusculus* is increasing and is estimated to double every 1-2 years. In 2004 it exceeded 50% of the catch (Erkamo et al. 2004). *P. leniusculus* fetches approximately half the price as *A. astacus* in Finland and Sweden. The introduced species has done better in southern Sweden than in the north and in Finland, and this may be a consequence of the cool climatic conditions in the latter two regions (Henttonen & Huner, 1999). In Europe as a whole in 1994 a total of 355 tonnes of *P. leniusculus* originated from capture fisheries and 51 tonnes from culture. This represents only 9% of European capture fisheries and 32.5% of culture fisheries (Ackefors, 1998, 1999).

**Habitat Description**

*Pacifastacus leniusculus* occupies a wide range of habitats from small streams to large rivers (e.g. Columbia River) and natural lakes, including sub-alpine lakes, such as Lakes Tahoe and Donner (Lowery & Holdich, 1988; Lewis, 2002). However, it also grows well in culture ponds. It is tolerant of brackish water and high temperatures. It does not occur in waters with a pH lower than 6.0. *P. leniusculus* is very active and migrates up and down rivers, as well as moving overland around obstacles. However, their rate of colonisation is relatively slow and may only be about 1 km yr-1. In one stream in England it took 17 years for them to spread 12 km downstream (Stanton, 2004). Their burrows can reach high densities, i.e. 14 m-1, and they can have a serious impact on bank morphology, causing them to collapse. It was considered to be a non-burrowing species, but in Europe in constructs burrows under rocks or in river and lake banks (Guan, 1994; Sibley, 2000).
Reproduction
The breeding cycle is typical of a cool temperate zone species, although *P. leniusculus* grows faster and reaches a greater size than its counterparts. Size at maturity is usually 6-9cm TL at an age of 2-3 years, although maturity can occur as early as 1 year. Mating and egg laying occurs during October in the vast majority of populations. Egg incubation time ranges from 166 to 280 days. In natural populations hatching occurs from late March to the end of July depending on latitude and temperature. Egg numbers usually range from 200 to 400, although some individuals of 66mm CL have been reported as having over 500 eggs. Based on the use of the lipofuscin technique it has been estimated that some individuals can live 16 years, and other estimates state that it may be as long as 20 years. Some individuals may grow to a large size, i.e. 95mm CL, but this may not represent a great age, but that of a fast-growing newly introduced population that encounters little competition. Estimates of survivorship to age 2 vary from 10-52%, being dependent on both abiotic and biotic factors. Competition and cannibalism can greatly affect survival in dense populations. Stebbing *et al.* (2003) demonstrated for the first time the presence of a sex pheromone, released during the breeding season by mature females, that stimulates courtship and mating behaviour in male *P. leniusculus*.

Nutrition
As an opportunistic polytrophic feeder, *P. leniusculus* will eat anything that is available, including other crayfish. The diet was found to shift from aquatic insects in juveniles, to more plant material in adults in some American populations (Lewis, 2002). However, Guan & Wiles (1997) found that cannibalism increased with size and that more animal than plant material was consumed by adults in a British river.
Full Account for: *Pacifastacus leniusculus*

**General Impacts**

*Pacifastacus leniusculus* displays opportunistic polytrophic feeding habits, although more animal than plant material may be consumed if available. It can have a considerable impact on populations of macro-invertebrates, benthic fish, and aquatic plants (Guan & Wiles 1997; Nyström, 1999; Lewis, 2002), it also has been used to clear weed from ponds on fish farms. Griffiths *et al.* (2004) found that the presence of *P. leniusculus* significantly reduced the number of Atlantic salmon using shelters in artificial test arenas. Sooty crayfish (see *Pacifastacus nigrescens* in IUCN Red List of Threatened Species), a native to the western USA, has become extinct partly due to interspecific competition with *P. leniusculus*, which was introduced into its range. *P. leniusculus* has also been implicated in causing a reduction in the range of the already narrowly endemic shasta crayfish (see *Pacifastacus fortis* in IUCN Red List of Threatened Species) in the western America (Taylor, 2002). *P. leniusculus* was introduced into Japan from Portland, Oregon five times during 1926 to 1930, where it has reduced the range of the indigenous *Cambaroides japonicus* on the island of Hokkaido (Hiruta, 1996; Kawai & Hiruta, 1999). It has also been found in some lakes on Honshu (Hiruta, S., 2005, pers. Comm.). In Europe, it has extirpated populations of the indigenous crayfish species, particularly the white-clawed crayfish (see *Austropotamobius pallipes* in IUCN Red List of Threatened Species) in England (Holdich, 1999; Hiley, 2003). However, in Finland it coexisted with the noble crayfish, (see *Astacus astacus* in IUCN Red List of Threatened Species), in a lake for 30 years, before reproductive interference led to the demise of the latter species (Westman *et al.* 2002). Its main impact has been as a vector of the crayfish plague fungus, *Aphanomyces astaci*, which has caused large-scale mortalities amongst indigenous European crayfish populations, particularly in England (Alderman, 1996). The disease has recently been confirmed in *P. leniusculus* from western Hungary, which could have serious implications for indigenous crayfish in the Danube catchment (Kiszely, 2004).

**Management Info**

There are no documented control agents for the successful management of *P. leniusculus* available at this time (Holdich *et al.* 1999). Trapping is size selective and the smaller individuals remaining take advantage of the lack of competition to grow rapidly (Sibley, 2000). Preventing the further introduction of this species into new bodies of water is one of the few options available. Educating the public to the environmental risks this species pose and identifying new populations are key elements to stopping the spread of this species where it is not wanted. Stebbing *et al.* (2003, 2004) have researched into the possibilities of using pheromones to attract male *P. leniusculus* into traps. Stringent legislation has been applied to *P. leniusculus* in Britain, which effectively makes it a ‘pest’ and bans the keeping of it in Scotland and Wales and much of England (Holdich *et al.* 2004). Despite this *P. leniusculus* continues to spread and may well cause the extinction of the single indigenous crayfish species within 30 years (Hiley, 2003; Sibley, 2003). Work is in progress in the UK to assess the use of natural pyrethrum again nuisance populations of *P. leniusculus* in enclosed waterbodies (Peay, 2005).

**Pathway**

*P. leniusculus* was first introduced into Japan from North America for use as food in 1928 (Kawai *et al.* 2002b).
Principal source:

**Compiler:** National Biological Information Infrastructure (NBII) & IUCN/SSC Invasive Species Specialist Group (ISSG)

**Review:** Dr D. M. Holdich, EMEC Ecology, England. Dr M. P?ckl, Institute of Ecology and Conservation Biology, Department of Limnology, University of Vien Austria

**Publication date:** 2005-04-26

**ALIEN RANGE**


**Red List assessed species 6:**
- **EX = 1; EN = 1; DD = 2; LC = 1;**
  - *Astacus astacus* VU
  - *Astacus leptodactylus* LC
  - *Austropotamobius pallipes* EN
  - *Austropotamobius torrentium* DD
  - *Cambaroides japonicus* DD
  - *Pacifastacus nigrescens* EX

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

53 references found for *Pacifastacus leniusculus*

**Management information**


**Summary:** Information on description, economic importance, distribution, habitat, history, growth, and impacts and management of species.


**Summary:** The electronic tool kits made available on the Cefas page for free download are Crown Copyright (2007-2008). As such, these are freeware and may be freely distributed provided this notice is retained. No warranty, expressed or implied, is made and users should satisfy themselves as to the applicability of the results in any given circumstance. Toolkits available include 1) FISK- Freshwater Fish Invasiveness Scoring Kit (English and Spanish language version); 2) MFISK- Marine Fish Invasiveness Scoring Kit; 3) MI-ISK- Marine invertebrate Invasiveness Scoring Kit; 4) FI-ISK- Freshwater Invertebrate Invasiveness Scoring Kit and AmphISK- Amphibian Invasiveness Scoring Kit. These tool kits were developed by Cefas, with new VisualBasic and computational programming by Lorenzo Vilizzi, David Cooper, Andy South and Gordon H. Copp, based on VisualBasic code in the original Weed Risk Assessment (WRA) tool kit of P.C. Pheloung, P.A. Williams & S.R. Halloy (1999).

The decision support tools are available from:


The guidance document is available from http://www.cefas.co.uk/media/118009/fisk_guide_v2.pdf [Accessed 13 January 2009].

FRS Freshwater Laboratory, UNDATED. _Signal crayfish - an unwelcome addition to Scottish streams._


**Summary:** This publication aims to first provide decision makers and managers with information on the existing international and regional regulations that address the use of alien species in aquaculture, either directly or indirectly; and three examples of national responses to this issue (New Zealand, Australia and Chile).


Summary: This chapter gives a good overview of the negative effects of crayfish populations on the environment. Global case studies are documented and general management solutions are mentioned.


Summary: This chapter gives an informative overview of methods of controlling crayfish, with an overview of the advantages and disadvantages of different methods and a good review of recent research.


Summary: This article includes historical information about the introduction of P. leniusculus into Finland and some of its environmental effects (eg: transmission of the crayfish fungus plague). It focuses on interspecific competition between the Noble crayfish (Astacus astacus) (native in Europe, including Scandinavia, and considered vulnerable by the IUCN, 1996). Mentions Finland’s role as Europe’s largest commercial producer of A. astacus.


Summary: Outlines the interspecific competition between P. leniusculus and C. japonicus for available shelters.


Summary: History of introduction and distribution of P. leniusculus in Austria.


Summary: The potential application of the pheromones in controlling P. leniusculus populations.


General information


Summary: This chapter overviews the commercial benefits gained from crayfish harvesting in Europe.


BBC News. 2003. North American signal crayfish has now been found in northern England, the last stronghold of Britain’s native white-clawed crayfish, already extirpated from most of southern England by the larger, more aggressive invader, pollution and habitat loss. November 17, 2003.


Summary: A review of the success of management strategies and the status of P. leniusculus in France.


Summary: Study on the effects of interspecific competition between P. leniusculus and Atlantic salmon for refuges on salmon densities.


Summary: An online database that provides taxonomic information, common names, synonyms and geographical jurisdiction of a species. In addition links are provided to retrieve biological records and collection information from the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF) Data Portal and bioscience articles from BioOne journals.

Summary: A comparison of temperature tolerance of P. leniusculus and C. japonicus.
Summary: This article includes historical information about the introduction of P. leniusculus into Japan. It mentions the impact of P. leniusculus on the native crayfish Cambaroides japonicus, which is considered to be endangered according to the Japanese Fisheries Agency (1998) and the Environment Agency (2000).
Summary: This chapter outlines and compares the possible effects of introduced and European native crayfish on macrophytes, algae, invertebrates, amphibians and fish.
Summary: Inference of aggressive interactions and shelter occupancy may be a critical disadvantage for C. japonicus if shelters are limited in natural situations.
Summary: A study on agonistic behaviour between P. leniusculus and A. torrentium (a crayfish native to Europe). Concludes that although neither species is inherently dominant P. leniusculus would still have an advantage because in a natural situation it is the larger and faster growing of the two species.
Summary: Examines the occurrence of Astacus astacus and P. leniusculus in Slicklampi, Finland. Reason for the decline in the population; Reproductive interference between two species; Effect of interspecific mating on eggs.