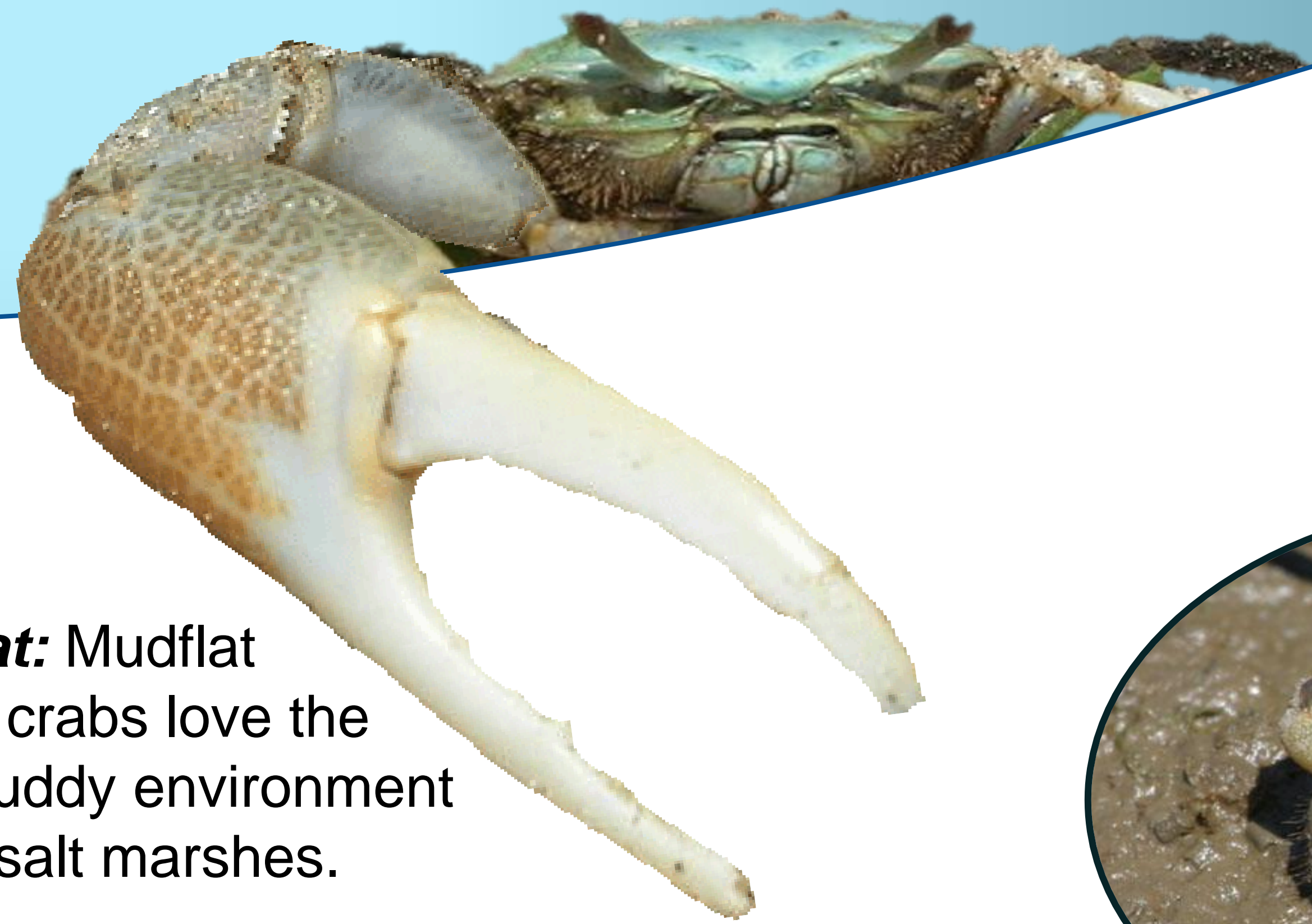


# MUDFLAT FIDDLER CRAB

*UCA RAPAX*



**Habitat:** Mudflat fiddler crabs love the soft muddy environment of the salt marshes.

**Food Sources:** Fiddler crabs are scavengers that pick through the mud for small worms, bacteria, fungi, dead animals and dead plant matter.

**Behavior:** Fiddler crabs are land dwelling crabs. They dig burrows below the surface of the sediment. When high water, predators, or cold temperatures threaten them, they will hide in their burrows and block the opening with mud.

**Cultural Common Name:** Tou-lou-lou, which means crab in Cajun.

**Where did they get that name?** Fiddler crabs are named for the large claw (also called a **cheliped**) on the males. During mating the male fiddler crab will wave his claw in the air to attract a female. The motion the fiddler crab makes look like a person playing the fiddle.



**The bigger, the better?** Having such a large claw can come at a cost. The male's large claw cannot be used for eating or digging the males have to work harder than the females for the nutrition and to make the shelter they need to survive.

**What happens if the crab loses a claw?** Fiddler crabs have an amazing ability to regrow limbs. If a fiddler loses a claw, they will regrow a new one. If a male loses its big claw, the small claw will grow to become the big claw. The newly grown claw will become the feeding claw. Not all fiddler crabs have their large claw on the same side, just like with people, there are left-handed and right-handed fiddlers.

**How do fiddler crabs grow?** Fiddler crabs grow by molting. This is a process where the fiddler crab will separate from a shell that is too small or damaged by the loss of a claw or leg. After losing the shell the fiddler crab is very soft and vulnerable at this point it usually hides in its burrow until its body has created the hard shell again. To make this shell the fiddler crab needs lots of nutrients, sometimes if the fiddler crab does not have enough nutrients it will eat its old shell to reabsorb some extra.

**Did you know?** Fiddler crabs are also important in helping the salt marsh. When fiddler crabs burrow in the salt marsh they expose the deeper soils to air. This extra air in the soil helps many of the salt marsh plants grow.

## Reference:

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## Photo credits:

Male :Photo credit: Ed Sigda, Prime Hook Birding 2005  
Female: Gulf Coast Research Laboratory 2012