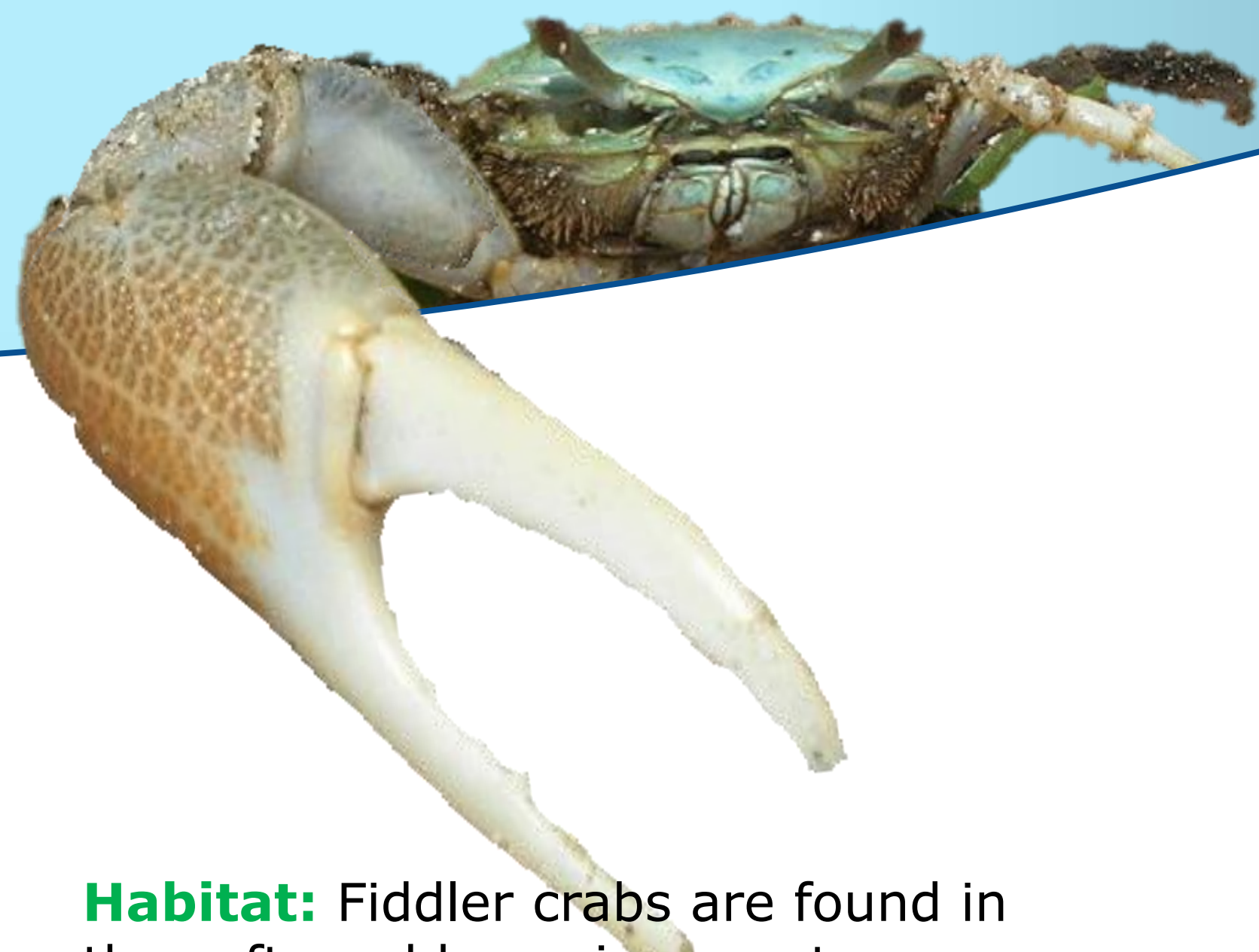


FIDDLER CRABS OF THE GULF



Habitat: Fiddler crabs are found in the soft muddy environments of salt marshes.

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

Behavior: They 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? These 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 when eating looks like they are playing a fiddle, hence the name fiddler crab.



What happens if the crab loses a claw?

Fiddler crabs have an amazing ability to regrow limbs. If a male loses its big claw, the small claw will grow and 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, just like other crabs, have exoskeletons. They need to molt to grow and to regrow lost limbs. During molting the crabs become very vulnerable to predation so they will remain in their burrows until their shells harden. Sometimes to gain more nutrients during molting fiddlers will eat their old shell to reabsorb nutrients.

Did you know? Fiddlers are also an indicator of marsh diversity. When fiddler crabs burrow they mix the soil and expose deeper parts of the marsh to air. This process is known as bioturbation, which brings nutrients and more oxygen to other plants and organisms making a more productive salt marsh.

Student Research at LUMCON:

Over the years students who have participated in LUMCON Estuarine Awareness and Discovery (LEAD) Camp and Field Marine Science Camp have been conducting ongoing research of fiddler crab burrows. Students are trying to understand the distribution, abundance, and length of burrows in high marsh versus low marsh areas. In the picture to the left, students are counting burrows in a 1x1 meter quadrat and casting burrows to measure length and shape.

Reference:

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8124, Hwy 56 Chauvin, LA 70344
www.lumcon.edu

Photo credit:

Male fiddler crab: Ed Sigda, Prime Hook Birding
Female fiddler crab: Gulf Coast Research Laboratory
Bottom Photo: Coastal Waters Consortium Photo Gallery-
gallery.cwc.lumcon.edu/index.php/Field-Marine-Science-Research-Camp/Tuesday-Wednesday