

Rusty Crawfish

Orconecte rusticus

Iowa Aquatic Invasive Species Fact Sheet

Description: The rusty crawfish is greenish-brown to brownish-red on the upper side of the body. Single, brown spots are located on each side near the middle of the animal. The large, robust claws are fairly smooth and gray-green to reddish-brown in color with a black band at the tip. Adults may be four inches long, not including claws.



Distribution: The rusty crayfish lives in creeks, rivers, and lakes with rock or gravel bottoms. It hunts aggressively for food, eating mainly plants and dead organisms. It reaches maturity at about 15 months of age. It lives three to four years. Mating occurs in the fall with egg laying in late spring. The number of eggs produced is dependent on the body size of the female, ranging from 50 to 350. Eggs hatch in May after being carried under the female's tail for about four to six weeks. It overwinters in burrows it constructs in streambanks or in other places in the ground. It may out-compete smaller, less aggressive native crayfish. It inhabits the Mississippi River; Missouri River; interior rivers and streams; natural lakes and prairie marshes; constructed lakes, ponds, and reservoirs. It's considered a common; exotic species in Iowa, that can be found mainly in the Northern half of Iowa and scattered in Southern Iowa in suitable habitats.

Threats: Rusty crayfish are prolific and can severely decrease stream and lake vegetation, depriving native fish and their prey of cover and food. They also reduce native crayfish populations.

Control: Many chemicals kill crayfish. Some even selectively kill crayfish; however, none are currently registered for crayfish control. Chemicals that kill crayfish will not specifically kill only rusty crayfish, but all crayfish. Some researchers have suggested that nuisance populations of rusty crayfish are the result of poor fisheries management and that by restoring a healthy population of bass and sunfish, rusty crayfish would be less disruptive in some lakes. The best method of control; however, is to prevent their introduction. Educating anglers, crayfish trappers, bait dealers, and teachers about the threats posed by rusty crayfish will help reduce the risk of spreading rusty crayfish to new areas.

Law: Iowa law makes it illegal to 1) possess, introduce, purchase, sell, propagate, or transport aquatic invasive species in Iowa, 2) place a trailer or launch a watercraft with aquatic invasive species attached in public waters, and 3) operate a watercraft in a marked aquatic invasive species infestation. The scheduled fine is \$500 for violating any of the above regulations. The law also requires the DNR to identify waterbodies infested with aquatic invasive species and post signs alerting boaters. The DNR may restrict boating, fishing, swimming, and trapping in infested waters.

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