

# Common Crayfishes of the Chicago Region

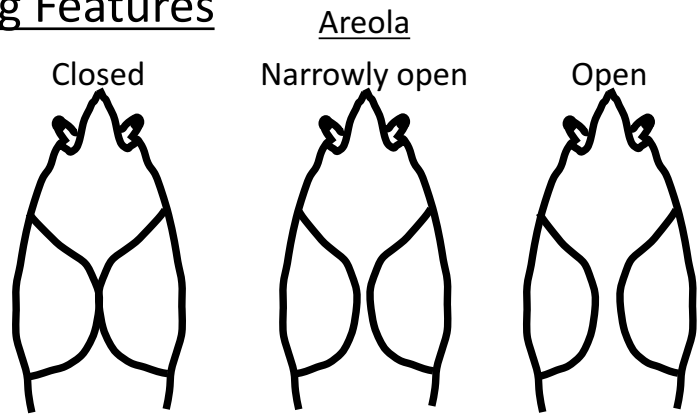
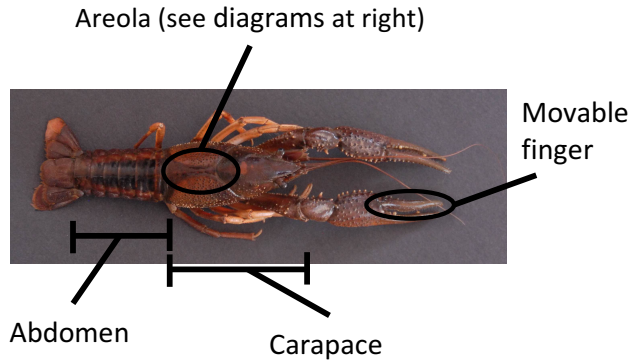
Jack Rosalie & Reuben Keller (Loyola University Chicago)

Photos and artwork by Jack Rosalie and Reuben Keller

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## Identifying Features



Size: Total length (TL) is from front end of carapace to end of tail and doesn't include claws. Crayfish in the Chicago region are usually found at 2.5 – 12cm (1-5 inches) TL. This guide includes identifying features that are generally only present in crayfish ≥ 5cm (2 inches) TL.

*Orconectes rusticus*



### Rusty crayfish (*Orconectes rusticus*)

Habitat: Found throughout Chicago waterways, inland lakes, and Lake Michigan.

Identification: Easily identifiable by 'rusty' red spots on each side of carapace (see inset photo). Areola open.

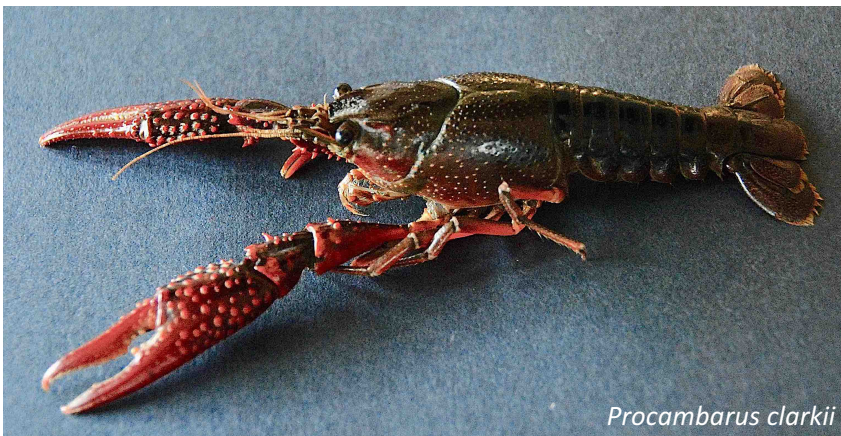
Notes: Invasive. Usually the dominant species where found.

### Red swamp crayfish (*Procambarus clarkii*)

Habitat: Slow-moving Chicago waterways. Occasionally in Lake Michigan harbors.

Identification: Adults red in color. Large claws covered in forward-pointing spines. Dark bars across abdomen segments. Areola closed.

Notes: A recent invader of the region and likely spreading. Can reach high population densities.



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*Orconectes virilis*

## **Virile crayfish (*Orconectes virilis*)**

**Habitat:** Found throughout Chicago waterways, inland lakes, and Lake Michigan. Often confined to habitats with very soft substrate and likely excluded from more favorable habitat through competition with rusty crayfish.

**Identification:** Light brown or green in color, two lines of dark blotches along abdomen. Areola narrowly open. Differs from calico crayfish by lacking incision at base of movable finger of claw.

**Notes:** Native. Rarely found, and only in low numbers.



*Procambarus acutus*

## **White River crayfish (*Procambarus acutus*)**

**Habitat:** Most often found in shallow flowing water and relatively undisturbed channels.

**Identification:** Reddish in color with dark bars along abdomen. Differs from red swamp crayfish by having smaller claws and an open areola.

**Notes:** Native. Rarely found, except in the Chicago River in some Cook County Forest Preserves.



*Orconectes immunis*

## **Calico crayfish (*Orconectes immunis*)**

**Habitat:** Most often found in shallow flowing water and relatively undisturbed channels.

**Identification:** Irregular light-colored stripe down abdomen. Inside edge of movable finger of claw has incision at base (like it's missing a tooth, see inset photo). Red or orange tips to claws. Areola narrowly open.

**Notes:** Native. Common in the Chicago River in some Cook County Forest Preserves.



*Orconectes immunis*

**Reference:** Christopher A. Taylor, Guenter A. Schuster & Daniel B. Wylie. 2015. Field Guide to Crayfishes of the Midwest. Illinois Natural History Survey Guide 15.