

Common Crayfishes of the Chicago Region

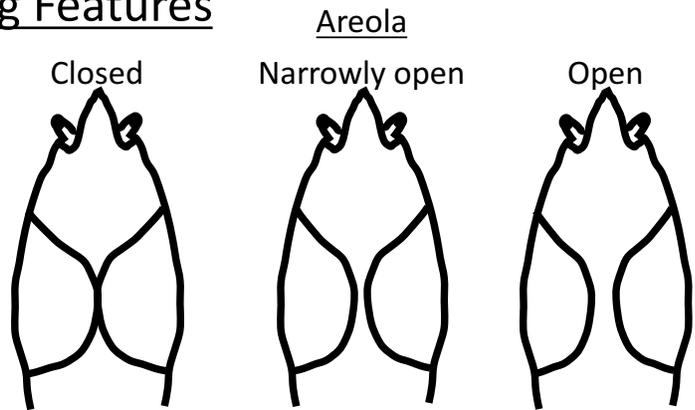
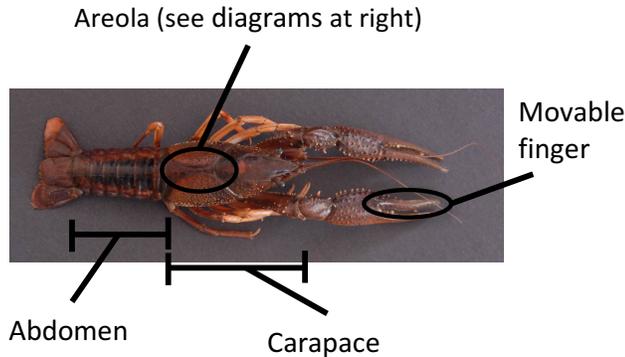
Jack Rosalie & Reuben Keller (Loyola University Chicago)

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 \geq 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.



Procambarus clarkii

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.