



Range Map

(Sciencedirect.com)

# ATLANTIC HORSESHOE CRAB

*Limulus polyphemus*

Poor

Conservation Status  
"Poor" in NYS

## FACT ONE



Horseshoe crabs are an arthropod and in their own class called Merostomata meaning "legs attached to the mouth". They are not crustaceans like other crabs and lobsters, but more closely related to spiders and scorpions.

## FACT TWO



Horseshoe crabs have blue blood based on copper, not iron like our blood. There is a compound in their blood called Lysate that is used to see if our injectable drugs, vaccines and medical equipment is clean before used.

## FACT THREE



Horseshoe crabs spawn on the high tides of the new and full moons, May-July. The largest crab in the front is a female and the smaller crab following behind her is a male. Sometimes, there are a few more males following close behind!

## FACT FOUR



Horseshoe Crabs are harmless! Their 10 claws don't have much power, they are just used to put food in their mouth. They have no teeth, their mouth feels like a toothbrush. The telson (tail) does not sting, stab, or attack! It is used to help the horseshoe crab flip over if it is upside down.

For more information about the Horseshoe Crab Monitoring Program:

<http://cesuffolk.org/marine/citizen-science/horseshoe-crab-monitoring>

[www.NYhorseshoecrab.org](http://www.NYhorseshoecrab.org)



## Overview

An Atlantic coast arthropod with an important ecological role, the horseshoe crab is a common sight along Long Island shorelines, especially in May-July when they come ashore to mate. Often, they are thought of as dangerous, but they are harmless. Very important to migrating shorebirds, their spawning events provide valuable food resources at their rest stops along their east coast Flyway. The average lifespan for the horseshoe crab is 25 years. Horseshoe crabs have not evolved for over 350 million years!

## Life History

Every spring from May to June, horseshoe crabs come ashore to spawn on the high tides of the new and full moons. The larger female will guide the male over to where she will dig a nest and lay up to 4000 tiny, green-colored eggs in a clutch. He will fertilize the eggs and in 2-4 weeks the eggs will hatch. Juveniles will stay close to the estuary's shore for about 2 years. Adults will migrate from the estuary out to the continental shelf, over 400 feet deep.

## Status

Today, the horseshoe crab stock in New York is listed by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) as "Poor". This commercial fishery is important for bait in eel and whelk pots, but also for the biomedical industry. This fishery is managed at a state level. In NY, there are limits to how many horseshoe crabs can be taken for commercially for bait, depending on season. Commercial fisherman have reduced the amount of horseshoe crabs taken by using bait bags and looking for alternative baits.

## How You Can Help

Become a Citizen Scientist and join Cornell Cooperative Extension's monitoring program to help count local horseshoe crab populations. If you see a live horseshoe crab on the beach, feel free to touch it and observe, but place it back in the water, holding all of its weight in your hands (not picking it up by its tail).

Visit [NYhorseshoecrab.org](http://NYhorseshoecrab.org) to join CCE Marine!



## Cornell Cooperative Extension | Marine Program



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