The Migratory Life Cycle of the Blue Crab, Callinectes sapidus

1 Males and females mate in marsh-lined creeks.

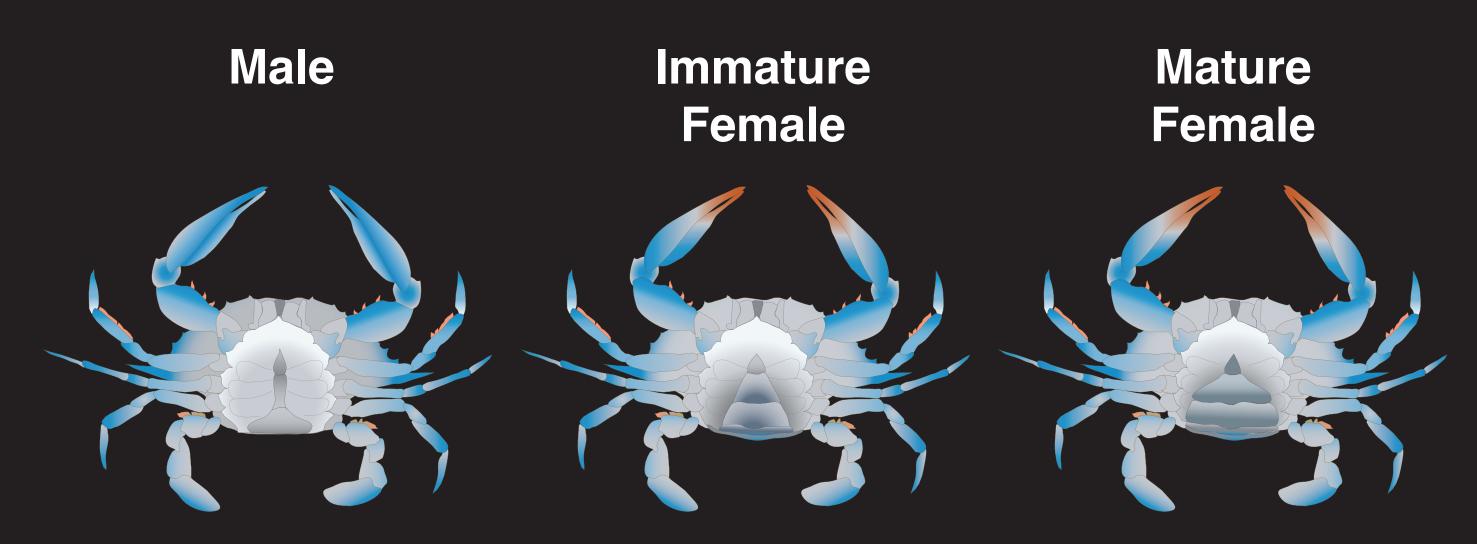
5 Juvenile blue crabs disperse up the estuary, heading towards fresher water.

4 Megalopae (post-larvae) migrate back into the estuaries and settle in seagrass beds and marsh edges.

3 Blue crabs hatch from the eggs as zoeae larvae.

2 After mating, females migrate seaward to release their larvae. The offspring need the saltier ocean water to survive. This migration can carry females many miles offshore.

Male or female?



Male blue crabs have a pointed abdomen, shaped like the Washington Monument. Female blue crabs have a triangular abdomen when immature, but the abdomen becomes broad and rounded when mature, shaped like the U.S. Capitol building.

What is the 'sponge' under some female crabs?



Female blue crabs carry their egg mass underneath their abdomen for 10–14 d until the eggs are ready to hatch. Each egg mass, or sponge, contains millions of eggs, and a female blue crab can produce more than 5 egg masses in her lifetime. The egg mass starts out orange in color, but changes to brown and then black as the eggs develop.



