

LOBSTERS

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SCIENTIFIC CLASSIFICATION

COMMON NAME:	lobsters
KINGDOM:	Animalia
PHYLUM:	Arthropoda
SUBPHYLUM:	Crustacea
CLASS:	Malacostraca
ORDER:	Decapodia
INFRAORDER:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Astacidea – clawed (chelate) lobsters• Palinura – spiny and slipper lobsters
FAMILY:	
GENUS SPECIES:	

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FAST FACTS

DESCRIPTION:	Lobster bodies are flattened and have a tail fan. All lobsters have a hard exoskeleton. Like other decapods, lobsters have 10 jointed legs. Clawed lobsters have the first pair of walking legs modified into large chelipeds (claws). Spiny lobsters or slipper lobsters may or may not have chelipeds, depending on the species. The compound eyes of a lobster protrude from the front of the carapace and are on the end of stalks. The head bears two pairs of antennae. The first pair is shorter and more slender than the second pair and has two sensory filaments. The second pair can be as long as a lobster body and has a single sensory filament.
SIZE:	The smallest lobsters, from the family Scyllaridae, are only 2.5 cm (0.98 in.) in length. The American lobster, <i>Homarus americanus</i> , may be 60 cm (23.6 in.) in length and weigh up to 22 kg (48.5 lb.).
LOCOMOTION:	Lobsters use their jointed limbs for walking or crawling on

surfaces. The well developed abdomen region of lobsters allows them to use a form of temporary "burst" swimming as an escape reaction. By rapidly contracting the lower abdominal muscles, the lobster quickly shoots backwards, using the tail fan for propulsion.

DIET:	Fishes, molluscs, crabs, sea urchins, sea stars, carrion, and other lobsters
FEEDING:	Scavengers and omnivores
REPRODUCTION:	Lobsters are either male or female. Female lobsters can only be fertilized when they are newly molted. The female chooses her mate and moves into its shelter about one week before molting. After mating, she remains with the male for about one week until her new exoskeleton has hardened. The eggs are attached to her swimmerets, near her tail on the abdomen. She will not molt again until the eggs have hatched, which can be up to 11 months.
RESPIRATION:	Gills are feathery expansions of the body wall and are located on the side of thoracic segments. The number of gills varies; <i>Homarus americanus</i> has 20 gills on each side of the body.
LIFE SPAN:	To 100 years
RANGE:	Temperate and tropical seas worldwide; from the intertidal zone to the deep sea
HABITAT:	Holes and crevices of rocky bottoms or coral reefs

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FUN FACTS

1. The order decapoda contains about one-fourth of the crustacean species. All decapods share the following features:
 - The first three pairs of thoracic appendages are modified as maxillipeds, leaving five pairs of legs.
 - The first pair of legs is modified as large claws, or chelipeds.
 - Most decapods are adapted for crawling. The legs are heavy and the pleopods are used for reproductive functions rather than swimming, as seen in shrimp.
 - The body is somewhat flattened and the exoskeleton is rigid.
2. In the Gulf of Mexico and the northern Caribbean the spiny lobster, *Panulirus argus*, migrates in masses. Every autumn, they line up single file and walk in long lines for several days, moving from shallow areas to deeper oceanic channels. This behavior may be triggered by winter storm fronts moving into the area and may help them to avoid rough water conditions in the shallow water.
3. The shell, or exoskeleton, of a lobster is hard and must be shed in order for the animal to grow. The process of leaving an old exoskeleton is called "ecdysis." The term "molting" refers to the entire process of preparing for and recovering from ecdysis.
4. It takes about six years for an American lobster to weigh 0.5 kg (1 lb.).

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ECOLOGY AND CONSERVATION

Lobsters are commercially caught in pots or traps, which they enter either seeking shelter or bait. Along the New England and Canadian coast, the lobster population has been badly overfished. Frozen lobster tails that are sold in markets are mainly from spiny and slipper lobsters from various parts of the world.

Beachcombers, tidepoolers, and divers must remember not to disturb or collect any specimens that they may encounter. The removal of animals from an ecosystem may disrupt ecological processes and decrease the diversity in areas that are frequently visited.

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