

Invasive species

Northern snakeheads, zebra mussels, hydrilla, and Japanese green crabs...and now mitten crabs. Every week, it seems that another alien species has invaded our waters, often with detrimental effects on native species.

Citizens can help with the invasive problem by serving as extra eyes in the environment. Always be aware of unusual fish, plants, animals or even invertebrates in Delaware. Most people who enjoy the outdoors are knowledgeable about the plants and animals that they commonly see. If you observe an out-of-place species or see something in the outdoors that you feel is very unusual, please contact the Division of Fish & Wildlife at (302) 739-9914 or (302) 653-2887.

Flathead catfish

Present in the Chesapeake drainage, the flathead was reported from the Schuylkill River and subsequently the main stem of the Delaware. Flathead predation might hinder shad, sturgeon, American eel, and striped bass restoration. They are most easily recognized by their flathead and lower jaw which sticks out farther than the upper.



PA Fish & Boat Commission photo.

Northern snakehead

Native to Asia, this widely-known fish was found in Maryland and caused a media frenzy. It has become established in the Potomac with thus-far unknown impacts on native fishes. The snakehead is a long cylindrical fish, with long dorsal and anal fins, and a large mouth with sharp teeth. Markings are dark irregular blotches on the sides. The snakehead prefers heavily vegetated ponds and streams.



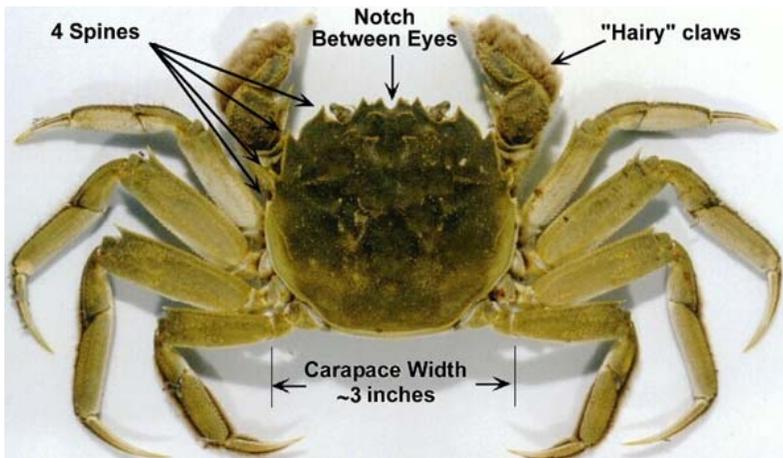
Zebra and Quagga Mussels

These closely related mussels can survive out of water for almost five days and are easily transported from one waterway to another as adults or larvae by humans. They are found in several quarries in Pennsylvania, often those used by divers. The mussels attach to anything (rock, pipelines, crayfish, mussels) in the water in large clumps, impeding water flow. Both species have light and dark bands.



USGS photo

Mitten crab



Found in the Chesapeake in 2006 by a commercial crabber, four individuals were also reported from Delaware waters in 2007. They are most easily identified by their fuzzy claws, a notch between the eyes, and tendency to live in fresh water.

Smithsonian photo

Nutria

Observed in the lower Nanticoke River and at Prime Hook National Wildlife Refuge, nutrias by their method of feeding, on marsh plants, can cause dramatic loss of wetlands. These large (up to 20 lb.) rodents resemble huge muskrats with long scaly tails, chubby cheeks, and bright orange teeth. If seen, please contact Steve Kendrot of the Maryland Nutria project at (410) 221-7857.



Photo: USDA/Steve Kendrot

NOTE: Remove all mud, aquatic plants, and animals from all gear, boats, motors, and trailers before leaving a body of water to avoid carrying a "hitchhiker" that may be an invasive species to your next destination.

For more information about invasives, go to the Delaware Invasive Species Council (DISC)'s web site www.delawareinvasives.net or to the Mid-Atlantic Panel on Aquatic Invasive Species: www.midatlanticpanel.org