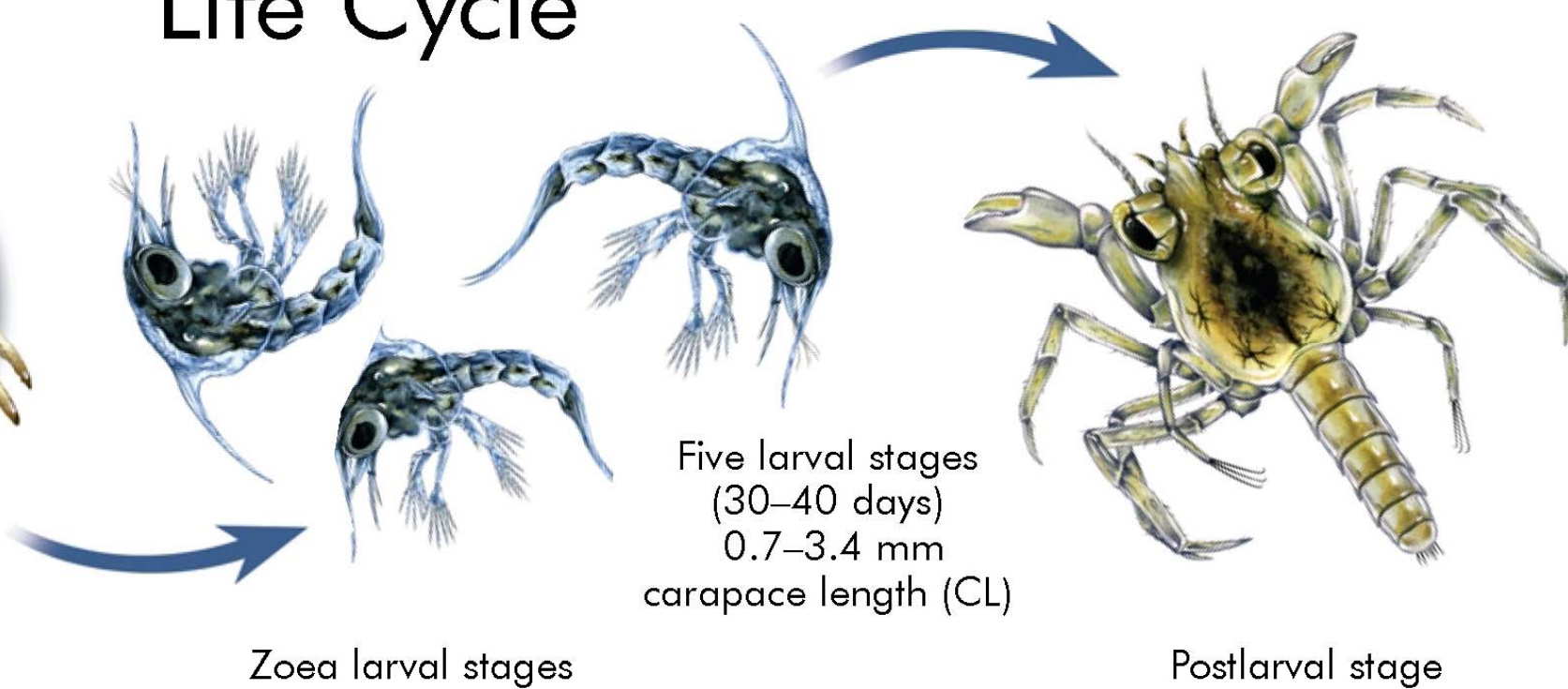


Life Cycle



Land Crab

Cardisoma guanhumi

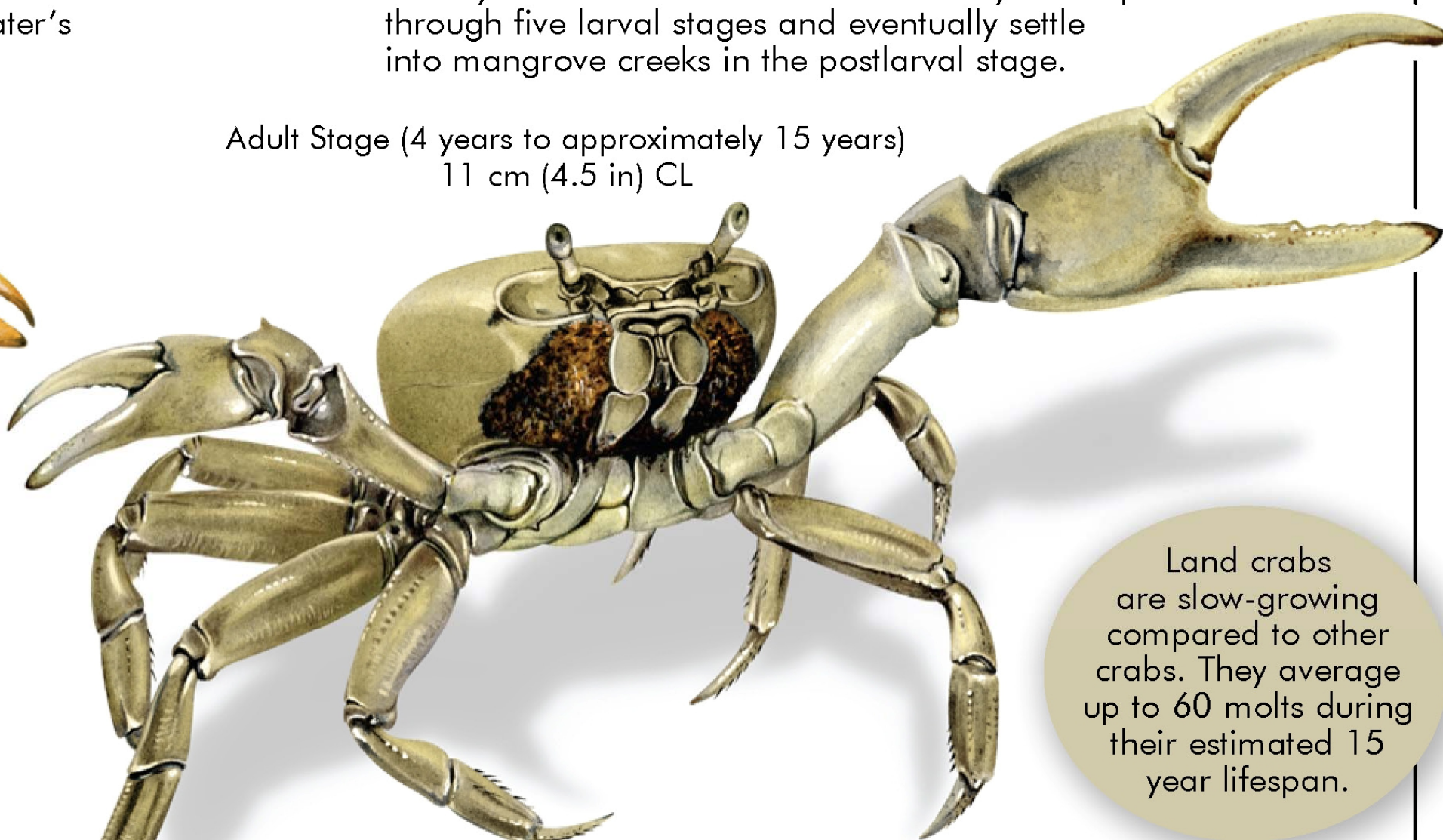
Commonly known as Blue Land Crab, White Land Crab, or Giant Land Crab

Though mostly terrestrial, land crabs rely on the ocean for part of their early life cycle. Spawning occurs from June–November or when spring rains begin. Once the eggs are fertilized, the crabs migrate to the coast, sometimes 5 km (3 miles), to deposit their eggs in the ocean. Migrating crabs must avoid natural predators and automobiles as they cross roadways. While some see land crabs as a nuisance because of their burrows, they are a vital part of many Bahamian and Caribbean ecosystems and diets.



Juvenile Stage (40 days–4 years)
0.5–10 cm (0.2–4 in) CL

- Juveniles develop one cheliped (claw) larger than the other, but as juveniles the size and shape does not distinguish males from females. They are usually tan with orange legs and a purple carapace. To grow, land crabs must shed their exoskeletons. This is called molting.



Adult Stage (4 years to approximately 15 years)
11 cm (4.5 in) CL

- Adult males are larger than females and often have a larger major cheliped. Adults are usually blue but may also be gray or tan. Spawning females tend to be gray or tan and return to blue after the spawning season.

Land crabs are slow-growing compared to other crabs. They average up to 60 molts during their estimated 15 year lifespan.

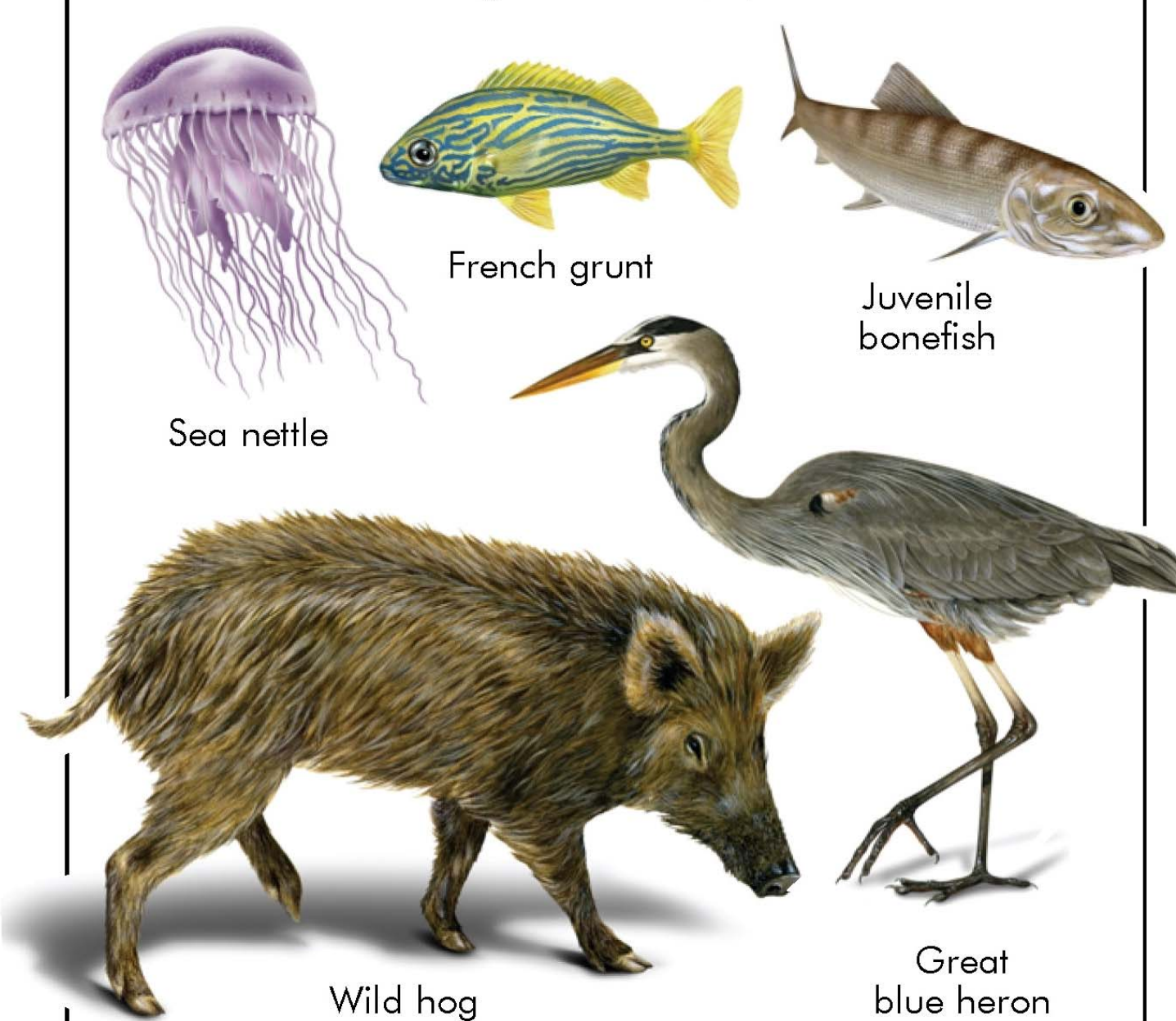
Diet

Land crabs prefer a diet of leaves, berries, flowers, grasses, and decaying plant material. Occasionally these crabs feed on insects, spiders, carrion, and feces. Land crabs typically do not stray far from their burrows to forage and often carry food in their claws back to their burrows to eat.



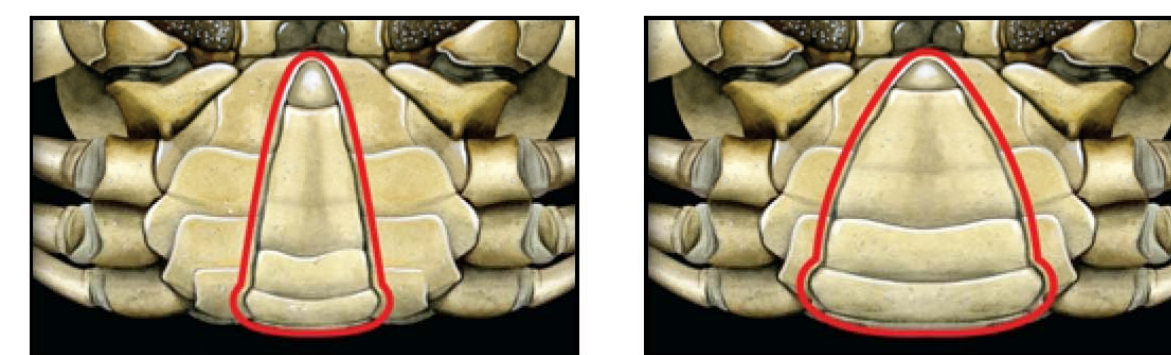
Natural Predators

Jellyfish and small fishes feed on larval crabs, while large mammals and wading birds feed on juveniles and adults.



Morphological Differences

The sexes of these land crabs can be determined by their distinctive underbellies. Males have narrow, candlestick-shaped aprons, while females have broader, spade-shaped aprons.



Habitat

Land crabs burrow into firm, muddy areas. Their burrows extend downward until they reach the water table. They can tolerate both freshwater and saltwater conditions, which is why they are often found inland. The crabs crawl down their burrows and periodically submerge themselves in the water to help maintain gill function and body moisture.



Land crabs seal their burrows with leaf litter while they are molting to protect themselves from predators. Molting takes 6 to 10 days to complete.

Ecological and Economic Significance

Land crabs are an important food source throughout the Bahamas and the Caribbean. Populations may be in decline in these areas due to overharvesting, land-clearing, and development.

How You Can Help

- Be mindful of migrating crabs in the roadway during spawning/migration season (June–November).
- Know harvesting regulations in your area, and do not take egg-bearing females.
- Protect land crab burrows from erosion and fill-in from development.



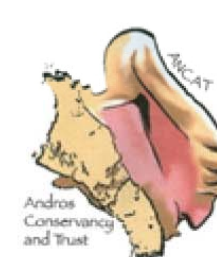
Do not harvest egg-bearing females.



Land crabs usually migrate at night.

Black crabs *Gecarcinus lateralis* are also an important food source. Their life cycles are very similar to blue land crabs and they face the same threats from habitat destruction and overharvesting.

The Nature Conservancy™
Protecting nature. Preserving life.



kerzner marine foundation
PARTNERS FOR THE OCEANS



Loxahatchee River District
"Preserving Nature by Design"™
Poster Series, No. 4
www.loxahatcheeriver.org