



Horseshoe Crabs

Horseshoe crabs aren't crabs at all! They're part of a different group and are more closely related to spiders. Let's learn more about these fossil-like creatures:

Identification:

On top, horseshoe crabs have a tank-like shell, eyes, and spike-shaped tail. They are slow-moving. On the underside, they have six pairs of legs, a mouth, and gills. On males, the first pair of legs (used for eating) become club-shaped for mating.

Behavior:

Despite their sharp appearance, these "crabs" are harmless. They use their tails to flip over if they're knocked upside down. They also swim upside down using their gills! Nesting can happen year-round in Florida, but mostly in spring and fall. The female crawls onto shore with the male on her back, laying eggs in the sand on the beach.



Female



Male

Front Legs

Habitat:

Horseshoe crabs live in sandy or muddy coastal waters. The American species is found all along the Atlantic coast and Gulf of Mexico.

Diet:

These bottom-feeders eat mostly mollusks and worms, and sometimes fish, crushing up its prey using bristles and a gizzard.

Helping People:

Horseshoe crabs have special blood! Not only because it's blue, but because it has cells called amebocytes with a special chemical that humans use to detect toxins from harmful bacteria in medicine.

