

## Ecology

Horseshoes are a vital part of the ecology of coastal communities. Their eggs are a major food source for many fish and northward migrating shorebirds, including the federally threatened red knot. These

shorebirds have evolved to time their migrations to coincide with horseshoe crab spawning. Adult horseshoes serve as prey for sea turtles, alligators, conchs and sharks.



## Biomedical Industry

Their unique blue blood holds a compound that's used by pharmaceutical companies to ensure that their intravenous drugs are free of potentially harmful bacteria. After extraction, the animals are released back into the wild.

So next time you get a vaccine, thank a horseshoe crab.



## Research & Tagging

Lack of funding and staff limits biologists in horseshoe crab research. Therefore, citizen scientists are providing an important service by helping the state keep track of populations to better manage and protect these important marine animals. See how you can help below...

### Attention Beachgoers:

Help us collect data on nesting horseshoe crabs by reporting tagged animals.



If you see a tagged crab (left):

- 1) Snap a picture or record the tag number. DO NOT remove the tag (UNLESS the crab is dead). NEVER pick a crab up by the tail.
- 2) Note the date, location, & time of sighting, and if crab is alive or dead.
- 3) Report the information: [www.fws.gov/crabtag](http://www.fws.gov/crabtag) 1-888-LIMULUS



Scan the QR Code to find out more! >>



## Why are HORSESHOE CRABS important?

Horseshoe crabs are an ancient and unique species that benefit humans as well as the natural world. These creatures are unlike anything on the planet...

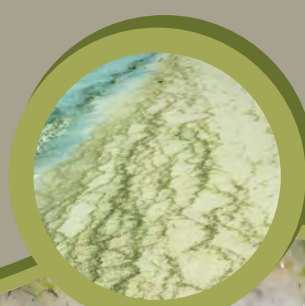


Find out why!

## Spawning Habits

Horseshoe crabs are known for their large nesting aggregations, or groups, on beaches. In Florida, they can nest year-round, with peak spawning occurring in the spring and fall.

+60,000  
EGGS  
per year



# The Biology of a Horseshoe Crab

Despite their name, horseshoe crabs are not crabs, but invertebrates that are more closely related to spiders than true crabs.

Horseshoe crabs are carnivores that belong to the Merostomata class, which means "legs attached to mouth".



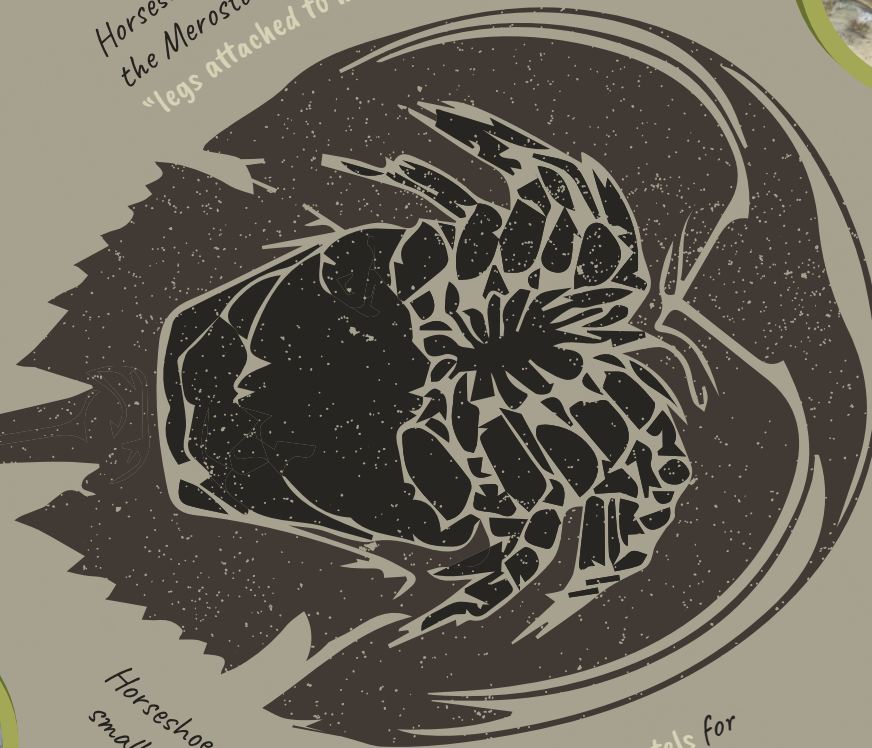
They have one set of **compound eyes** designed for finding mates.

Light sensors are located on the tail, underneath, and on the front of the crab. These help detect UV light and keep the brain synced with day and night.

Researchers have traced their roots back 450 million years. Horseshoe crabs have existed so long that they're considered **living fossils**.

## Limulus polyphemus

[lim-yu-lus poly-fe-mus]



Horseshoe crabs possess over 750 individual muscles and must shed, or molt, their shell in order to grow.



Their long, spike-like tail may appear dangerous, but it's actually meant to steer while swimming, and allows them to **flip themselves over**.



Horseshoe crabs are also considered **walking hotels** for smaller marine organisms like barnacles.

Native Americans used their shell to bail water, and used the tail as a spear tip.



Females typically outweigh males.



Never pick up a horseshoe crab by its tail, it can harm them.