

SOFTSHELL CRABBING

FOR FAMILY FUN

Softshell crabbing can be a family fun outing. Don't miss this adventurous activity!

Softshell crabbing must be done at night and this requires some type of light. The most popular today being the Coleman gas lamp, but once in a while one sees an old-time kerosene-burning flambeaux, a torch which casts a "soft" yellow light in comparison with the harsh white glow of the Coleman lamp.

Softshell crabs are molted blue crabs. The crab grows by shedding its shell and stretching its new "softshell" an inch or so larger than the old one. The crab will shed more readily as the moon fills and the proper time is on the falling tide - - low falling tide preferable. The reason for this is that a crab can shed on the falling tide, remain in an isolated tidal pool, and when the incoming tide reaches its hideout it

is ready to resume its life in nature's underwater world with a fast-hardening shell.

The crab is highly vulnerable to all its enemies while in the softshell stage and must hide by digging into the bottom, hiding beneath some can, oyster shell or other bottom impediments, or by isolating itself from its enemy in a tidal pool.

This trait is what makes the softshell crab an easy prey for the human hunter or softsheller. One merely needs a basket to carry the crabs in or some other carrying case but it should not be a container that does not shed water. There have been some surprised people who picked up softshell crabs, deposited them in a bucket of water (to keep them alive) and lo! and behold, how surprised they were when their softshells had turned into hard crabs. Keeping the softshell out of water is the only way to keep it from hardening--and it will stay alive a long time. Try putting some damp sea grass atop. Softshells can be stored in an ice box for many hours and stay alive.

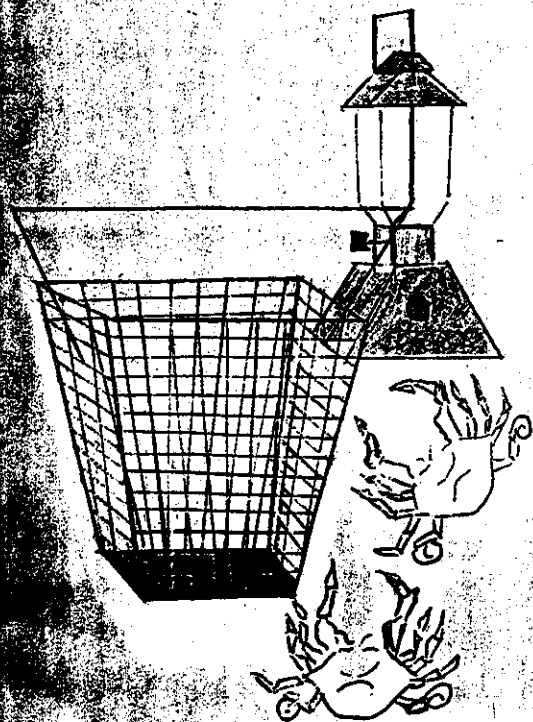
No equipment is actually necessary for "catching" softshells but the beginner may want to bring along a scoop net. Often one may find a softshell lying helplessly in a bottom depression right alongside of his "shed" or old shell from which it has just emerged. At this stage the crab can neither swim well, nor use its claws and can be picked up with no trouble. An expert can tell by the crab's color if it is soft, hard or a shedder or "buster".

A shedder crab is one that is on the verge of shedding its shell and becoming softshell. These are picked up and usually assigned to an isolated tidal pool where a later checkup is made to pick up the shedded softshell.

For the uninitiated, the softshell crab cleaned (remove lungs, eyes and mouth parts, apron and sand bag) lightly rolled in corn meal and fried is a true gourmet's delight. And, don't remove that top shell or any of the legs or claws--the crab is fried whole and eaten entirely.

We highly recommend a night floundering and softshelling for a mixed group, a family group or just

a couple of Tom Sawyers--its a lot of fun and the panorama of living marine life one sees on the expedition are bonuses. And, best of all, a successful night winds up in loading the table with the best eating in the world.



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*Soft shell
Crabbing*

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