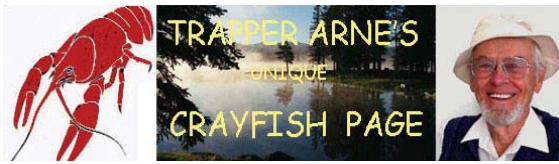


Trapper Arne's Crayfish Newsletter for

JANUARY 2013 – Happy New Year



the **CRAYFISH TALE**

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CRAYFISH 'DOWN UNDER'

Crayfish are abundant practically all over the globe. Yes, there are exceptions. The arctic regions have no crustaceans any more, but when those areas were warm and balmy, as they were a few million years ago, then they also had crayfish.

Another exception to the rule of crayfish all over is Africa where you will find very few native crayfish. Transplanted crayfish in Africa are beginning to me more common today, but natives, no. Strangely, Madagascar, the large island just east of Africa, has plenty of native crayfish. So why not the African continent?

But let's talk about Australia. That continent has plenty of native crayfish, at least a hundred different species of them. That compares to the US where we have over 300 species. Strangely, the country where my crayfish interest started, Sweden, has only one indigenous species of crayfish, the noble crayfish (*Astacus astacus*) and the same apparently goes for Finland. Lately, however, both countries have imported the US Signal crayfish, so now they have at least two species.

One interesting fact about the species of crayfish in Australia is that they also boast of having not only the largest species of crayfish, but also the

smallest. Down in Tasmania, the island south of mainland Australia, we find the huge crayfish, the Tasmanian Giant Freshwater Crayfish (*Astacopsis gouldi*) which can achieve a weight of up to eleven pounds. Practically the size of a lobster. Unfortunately, this species is becoming increasingly rare mostly due to its size which makes it a prime target for crustacean eating Aussies.

Then we have another rather sizeable crayfish, the Murray Crayfish (*Eus-tacus armatus*) which can reach 4.4 lb and is found in much of the southern Murray-Darling basin. (The Murray-Darling Basin is a large geographical area in the interior of southeastern Australia) This compares to the rather puny US and European crayfish which are considered large if eight of them weigh as much as a pound.

But on the Australian mainland we also find the most common of their crayfish, the Yabby, which is of the genus *Cherax* (infraorder Astacidea, family Parastacidae and a species of *Cherax destructor*.) The name Yabby derives from the word *yabij* in an aboriginal language. While the common yabby is more of the size we are used

to in the US, it still is often rather large and can weigh up to a maximum of about 11 ounces. Personally I like the size of its hefty claws which can contain a sizeable chunk of meat. The Yabbi is what you usually find at Australian crayfish boils.

Adding to the confusion when it comes to identifying crayfish is the habit of both Aussies and South Africans to also call the salt water spiny lobster a crayfish. I have received orders for regular crayfish traps from South Africa but had to point out to the prospective customers that to catch the salt water 'crayfish' they would need a completely different type of trap - a lobster pot.

An interesting genus found only in Queensland is *Tenuibranchiurus*. This genus includes the world's smallest crayfish, '*Tenuibranchiurus glypticus*', which does not exceed one inch in length and has claws which open vertically rather than horizontally.

Another species down under, which has become rather popular lately in the US, is the Red Claw Crayfish (*Cherax quadricarinatus*). One of its characteristics, except for the partially red claw, is its size and speed of growth. This has made several US crayfish farmers specialize in this species. Many red claw crayfish are twice the size of North American crayfish and they contain 30% edible "meat" compared to 15% for *Procambarus clarkia*, the most common crayfish in Louisiana. Other Australian species are fairly rare and thus usually are not used for food.

To further add to the species confusion among Australian crayfish, we find the Marron. Together with the Red

Claw Crayfish they are both considered 'noxious' in a similar way that the US Rusty crayfish is considered an invasive species. And invasive species, as we all should know, are a threat to local and native species by competing for food and habitat.

But many of the Australian crayfish species are now on the threatened list. One of the most difficult threats to tackle is climate change. With continued warming and drying, these species are simply going to run out of habitat. Crayfish are poikilothermic (unable to regulate their own temperature), and are completely at the mercy of their environment. In addition, these species are highly adapted to cool temperatures, and thus are restricted to high, cool streams. With only a very narrow altitudinal window to start with, there is literally no room to move – nowhere to run, no way to hide.

The Marron, like the Yabby, is a *Cherax* species. The Marron has become one of the main farmed species among Australian crayfish and is now considered a luxury product and the subject of a developing aquaculture industry. Tons of Marrons are farmed and in Western Australia, recreational fishing for marrons is tightly controlled, with a limited season, permits and minimum size enforcement.

Then I tried to find out how Aussies serve their yabbies. Strangely I found very few web sites showing this technique. Apparently there are many ways that Aussies serve them, but some ways are the same as in Louisi-

ana. Yabbies are cooked in perforated cooking vessels and then dumped unceremoniously on a table covered with newspapers or Kraft paper. Among the recipes I located for cooking Yabbies, I found my old friend the dill weed.

However, I also saw a rather formal setting with people at a well set table with plates and glasses for every one. Just like in Sweden. Oh well, to each his own.

HAPPY NEW YEAR AND MAY YOUR CRAYFISH TRAPS ALWAYS BE FULL.

Greetings.

Trapper Arne

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