

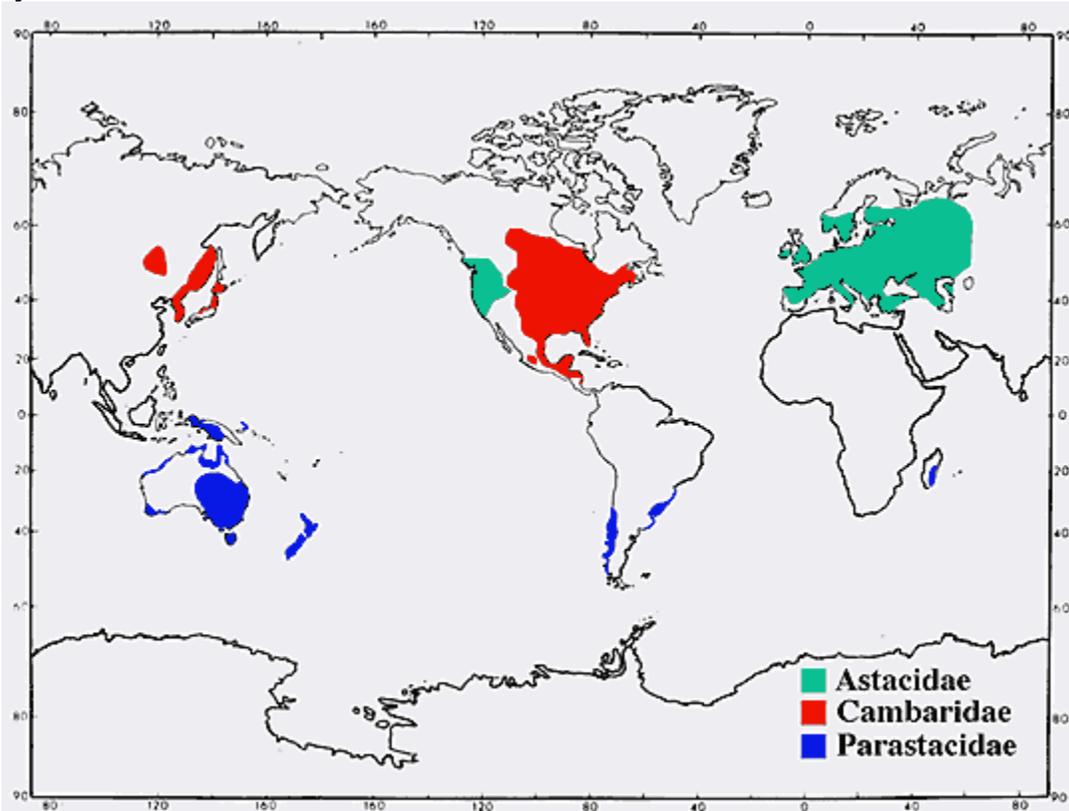


**The
CRAYFISH TALE
By TRAPPER ARNE**

CRAYFISH AROUND THE WORLD

Swedes and Louisiana Cajuns are not the only people who appreciate crayfish. Almost wherever you go in the world, you find both crayfish and those who love these crustaceans. A peek at the Internet, my main source of information nowadays, led me to the map of crayfish distribution below, which you may also find interesting. (If you don't see the map, it may appear as an attachment.)

Three areas of crayfish distribution stand out. The one in Europe (which of course includes my home country Sweden) and in the USA. The third largest area for crayfish belongs to Australia, where the 'Yabby' is wide spread and sought after as a specialty food.



Europe is well known for its crayfish, well spread from Scandinavia in the north down to Spain and over into Russia. France even honored us with the name crayfish, which is a derivation from the French word 'ecrevisse'. England has its native white-clawed crayfish that is now threatened by the US Signal crayfish import which, while cursed in England is praised in Sweden where it is taking the place of the native crays that succumbed to the fungal crayfish plague.

An area of surprise is the one in China. Not until I searched for another source of crayfish traps did I understand what a large source for crustaceans we have in China. And when the Louisiana crayfish dealers started complaining about the Chinese dumping crayfish on the US market I realized the size of the Chinese crayfish market.

Even European crayfish growers have complained about this Asian invasion, so apparently the Chinese have plenty of crayfish. In 2002, China exported 8,000 tons of crayfish tail meat to the US while Louisiana itself only produced 500 tons. Recently, a pound of frozen Chinese crayfish tails in New Orleans supermarkets sold for around \$4 a pack compared to \$8 for crayfish that came from a few miles up the road.

I also remember well my surprise when served imported Chinese crayfish when visiting Sweden, but not being impressed by their taste. But that is another story.

Japan is a different case. Japanese crayfish are mostly used in aquariums, and strangely, several species are related to either Louisiana crawfish or the California signal crayfish. Even Australian yabbies are found in Japanese aquariums. But crawfish boils like those in the US seem to be rare in Japan. I could not help smiling when reading that some people there refer to them as 'clayfish'.

But in Australia, the distribution map shows clearly that crayfish, or yabbies as they call them, are quite popular on dinner tables. Especially if you go to Tasmania where the yabbies grow so big that they look like salt water lobsters. Some of these crayfishes reach a foot or more in length, and are as large as our full-sized lobsters. While some other of their crayfish species have prickly spines all over making them painful to shell, the yabbie looks a lot like the species we are used to in the US. Another species is the Marron, dark brown or black or sometimes a bright blue color. The striking blue variety of the Marron is being selectively bred and becoming increasingly popular as pets. The most common crayfish, though, seems to be the Redclaw, which is both sold to the aquarium market as well as to those who enjoy the tail meat. Redclaw is a sought-after product with a delicate crustacean flavor.

With the exception of Chile and the south of Brazil, South America shows a dearth of crayfish. This is surprising since Antarctica, during prehistoric times when the polar axis pointed somewhere else, has been found to have harbored crayfish, so why no crays in southern Argentina?

In my search for crayfish information, I stumbled on a surprising source of data in a book written by T.H. Huxley. In itself not so surprising, except that he wrote this enormously detailed treatise about crayfish in 1878! In this heavy tome available to be read in its entirety on the Internet, you can learn just about anything about crayfish. Apparently, during the Permian geological period, about 300 million years ago, when most landmasses on the globe were found as one huge continent of land, there were crayfish living all over and having no problem spreading to other parts of the land mass as fossils in both Antarctica and the Pacific area show. Summer temperatures of streams and lakes near the South Pole that supported the crayfish probably then reached 50-70 degrees F during some periods.

However, the greatest surprise on the crayfish map is the lack of crayfish in Africa. With the exception of Madagascar, only a few places in Ethiopia and along the Nile, show any signs of crayfish. As Madagascar has a surprising amount of crayfish you would think that the nearby coast of South Africa also would harbor them, but not so for some unknown reason. I ran into a home made movie about catching crayfish in Madagascar and was tickled to see that they look just the same as those my mother used to buy at a Stockholm market place. The lack of crayfish in the tropics may not be surprising, but why don't we find them in southern parts of Africa, which, like Madagascar, have climates favorable to crayfish?

In summary, crayfish are rather well distributed over the world in today's temperate zones. But with some notable exceptions, crayfish are generally not a very popular food. And that is fine with me. That leaves that much more left over for me to catch and eat!

Trapper Arne