

## IMPORTANCE

Horseshoe crabs provide many benefits to the environment, human health, and even the economy! Horseshoe crab eggs are an important food source for migratory birds as well as 20 other species in the Coastal Bays! Their blue blood is used to detect the presence of endotoxins in injectable drugs and is used in cancer research. Their blood is part of a multi-million dollar industry. They are also used as bait for conch and eel.

## THREATS

Horseshoe crabs can become stranded on the beach in rocks during low tide and unable to move, causing them to die. If you find a stranded horseshoe crab, **pick it up by the sides of the head** and gently place it back in the water.

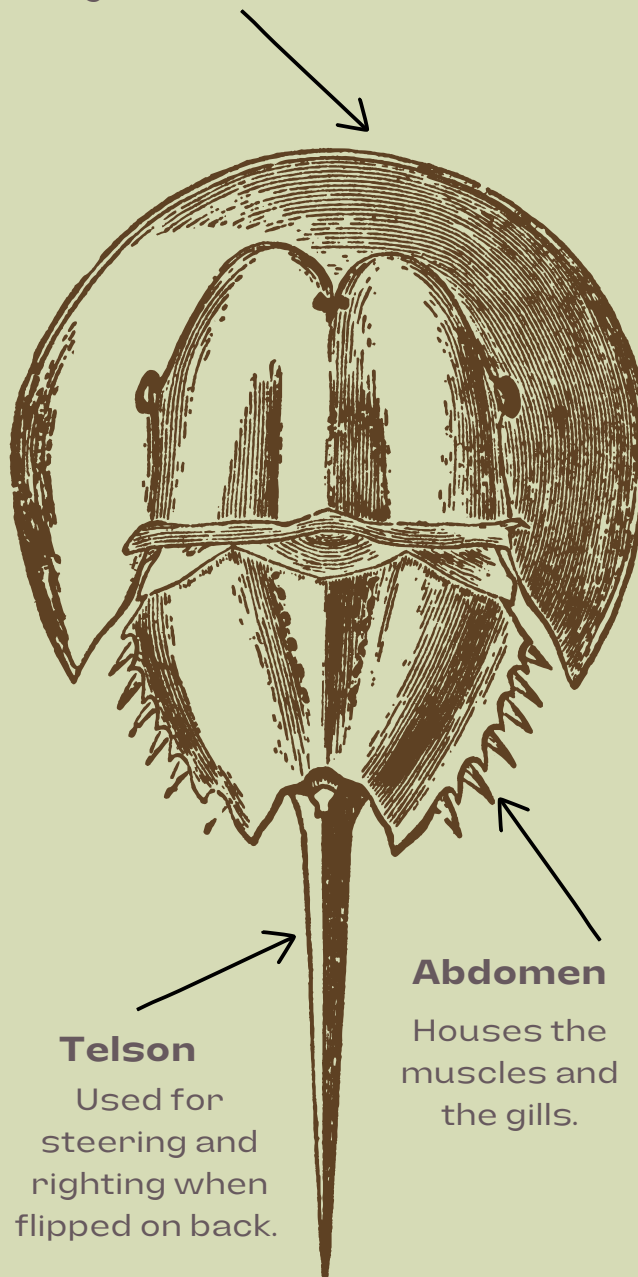


**CAUTION: Rocks can be slippery and unstable. Please be safe and only attempt if you're wearing closed toed shoes.**

## ANATOMY

### Head

Holds the major organs, five pairs of legs and the mouth.



### Abdomen

Houses the muscles and the gills.

### Telson

Used for steering and righting when flipped on back.

## SPAWNING

Horseshoe crabs spawn during the summer months around the new and full moon lunar cycles. They start spawning when the water temperature reaches 15°C. Females are the larger of the species and have no clamping claws. A single female can lay up to 88,000 eggs in one spawning season! These eggs are very tiny and blend into the sand. They take about a month to hatch. See the photo below!

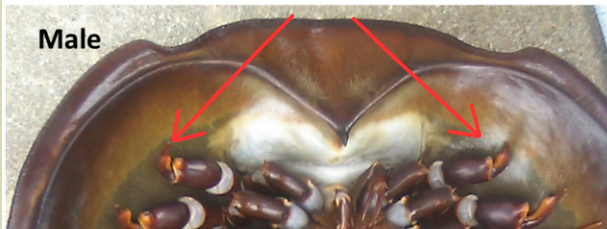
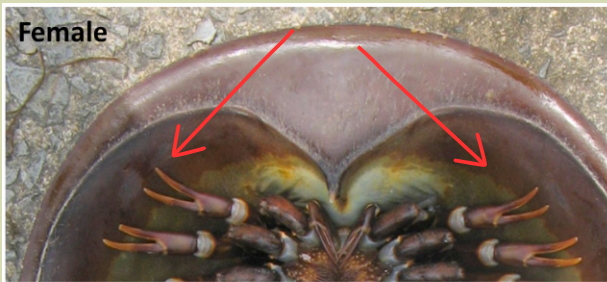




## FUN FACTS

- Horseshoe crabs are 445 million years old! They're even older than the dinosaurs!
- There are 4 species of horseshoe crabs but only one exists in North America. (*Limulus polyphemus*).
- Horseshoe crabs are more closely related to spiders and scorpions than to crabs!
- Horseshoe crabs feed on marine worms and small shellfish like razor and soft shelled clams.
- Males have more of a rounded first walking leg than females whose leg is more scissor shaped as seen on the photo below.

## MALE VS. FEMALE



## ABOUT US



The Maryland Coastal Bays Program (MCBP) was founded in 1996 as a 401(c)3 nonprofit. The foundation exists to protect and conserve the waters and surrounding watershed of Maryland's Coastal Bays to enhance their ecological values and sustainable use for both present and future generations. Since 2002, MCBP, MDNR, and volunteers have been conducting annual surveys to assess horseshoe crab populations throughout the Maryland Coastal Bays. Scan the QR code below to learn more about MCBP!



# HORSESHOE CRABS IN THE MARYLAND COASTAL BAYS

