California Finfish and Shellfish Identification Book

**Red Swamp Crayfish** 



The r e d swamp crayfish was introduced τo California the earlv in 1900s from Louisiana. It is now found throughout southern California and in the heavily agricultural Central Valley. It can also be found in some parts of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, but usually prefers ponds, slower streams and creeks, and irrigation canals in both freshwater and brackish environments.

## **Distinguishing Characteristics**

Usually brick red when adult, juveniles are drab gray. Somewhat smaller than the native variety. Carapace shell and claws covered in bumps. Blue vein visible under the tail. Pincers narrow and long.

## Life History & Other Notes

Although it is highly prized in its native Louisiana, this aggressive, territorial crayfish is considered an agricultural pest in California. Unlike signal crayfish, the red swamp crayfish thrives in the rice fields of the Central Valley, making its home by burrowing 24 to 40 inches into the mud banks of the rice checks and levees. They can seriously weaken earthen banks, increasing erosion. This crayfish's

burrowing behavior destroys other important wildlife habitat as well.

Red swamp crayfish feed on young rice shoots (taking a further toll on rice crops) and other plants, insect larvae, tadpoles, snails, and newt larvae. They are not affected by newt toxins, which ward off predation by native crayfish. This makes native newts particularly susceptible to predation by this introduced crayfish, and in fact they are blamed for declines in newt populations in some areas.

## Red Swamp Crayfish

Procambarus clarkii OTHER COMMON NAMES

Louisiana crawdad

RANGE & HABITAT South & Central California in slower streams & creeks, irrigation canals, rice paddies

LENGTH To 5 in.

**DIET/SUGGESTED BAIT** Feeds on plants,

small invertebrates & amphibians Bait traps or lines with liver, bacon, fish, canned cat or dog food