

Vlaams Instituut voor de Zee
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22962

AN AMENDMENT TO THE CRAB KEY

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ABSTRACT

The crab key (Crothers and Crothers, 1983) is amended to incorporate the pelagic crab *Planes minutus*. The finding of this species off Fair Isle (Shetland), 59°33'N, is probably the northernmost record.

WHILST on passage between Fair Isle and the mainland of Shetland, 28 November 1989, the crew of the *Good Shepherd* spotted a large floating coil of rope. Neil Thompson wrote to the *Shetland Times* describing what they found when, to save it fouling another boat's propellor, this raft of 5" thick rope was hauled on board. "It had clecks (goose barnacles) up to 8" or 9" long. Closer inspection revealed a whole ecosystem. Crabs were in amongst the clecks and the rope was covered with ghost shrimps. I also saw a fair number of sea spiders."

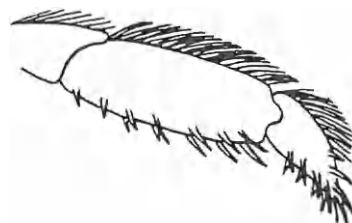
Nick Riddiford, at the Fair Isle Bird Observatory, sent specimens of the crabs to me for identification, as they are not illustrated in Crothers and Crothers (1983). They were *Planes minutus* (L.), the gulfweed crab, a pelagic species common in the seaweed *Sargassum*, especially in the Sargasso Sea. They are occasionally found on other floating objects, including turtles and ships, and may be stranded on the shore. This is not the first time they have been found amongst goose barnacles (see Ingle, 1983) and I, at least, shall look for this crab whenever I find the barnacles washed ashore.

In Britain, *Planes minutus* has most often been found on the coasts of Devon & Cornwall, but, with this record from Shetland, could be found on any west-facing coast. Ingle (1983) gives East Channel, Channel Islands, Plymouth, Scilly, Solway, Mayo, Fastnet, Rhine. Christiansen (1969) notes it may be taken at sea in the North Atlantic up to 50°N, and has one shore record from the Netherlands. Outside our area, it has been found throughout the Mediterranean, in Portugal and Madeira.

The Shetland record extends its known range north to 59°N and it has recently turned up in Brittany (Udekem d'Acoz, 1986). As it may appear on any of our western coasts it warrants inclusion in the main body of our crab key, and not just a footnote. When it is next reprinted, Crothers and Crothers (1983) will be amended. Meanwhile, the footnote on p.767 should be deleted. The existing couplet 21 should be renumbered as 21a, and a new couplet 21 be inserted before it:-

- 21 Distal segments (dactylus and propodus) of each walking leg with a row of spines along the underside. Carapace almost square and with very large eyes. Dactylus of the fifth (last) walking leg slightly flattened, but not expanded as a paddle. Carapace up to 20mm across . . .

Planes minutus



- Dactylus and propodus of each walking leg without spines, although they may be fringed or covered by hairs. If the carapace approximately square, then with small eyes. Carapace may be much more than 20 mm across .

21a

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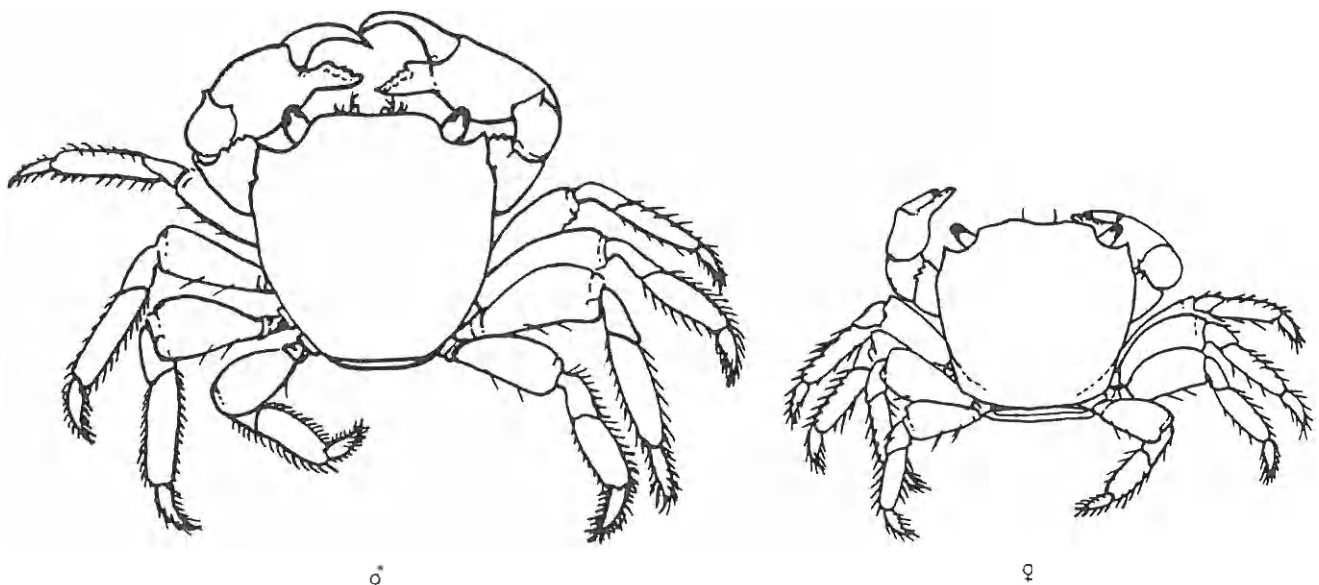


FIG. 1.

Planes minutus. Male (♂) 12.7 mm and female (♀) 13.0 mm carapace breadth drawn from specimens collected off Fair Isle (59°33'N:1°38'W) by the crew of the "Good Shepherd" 28 November 1989.