

Occurrence of the grey swimming crab *Polybius vernalis* (Risso, 1827) on Rathlin Island, Northern Ireland: northernmost record so far (Crustacea, Decapoda, Brachyura)

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In Northwest Europe, the grey swimming crab *Polybius vernalis* (Risso, 1827) has long been confused with its close relatives *P. holsatus* (Fabricius, 1798) and *P. marmoreus* (Leach, 1814) (d'Udekem d'Acoz & Rappé, 1991; Ingle & Clark, 1998, as *Liocarcinus* spp.). It is not yet known how far north its distribution reaches, but its northernmost published record was from Clew Bay, Clare Island, west coast of Ireland, 53°47.4'N 009°51.6'W (McCarthy et al., 2005), and on the East coast of the British Isles, it was recorded as far north as River Orwell, 51°58.64'N 001°16.50'E (Ashelby, 2006). A more northern record is reported here: a dead female missing its chelipeds, carapace size 25 x 31 mm, washed ashore at Rathlin Island, Church Bay, Northern Ireland, 55°17'18"N 006°11'25"W, 20.vii.2011 (fig. 1).

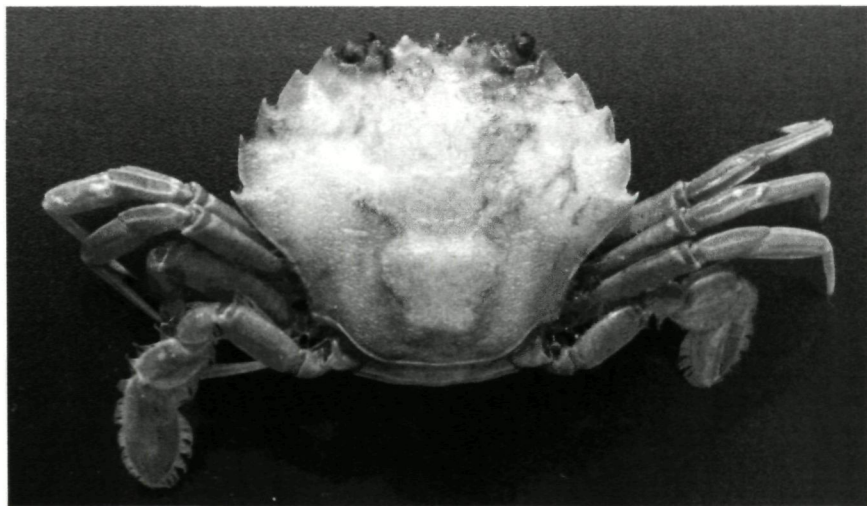


Fig. 1.- *Polybius vernalis* (Risso, 1827), female, Rathlin Island, Northern Ireland, washed ashore.
Dim. 25 x 31 mm.

It exhibits the following characteristics: median frontal tooth reaching the same level as the submedian ones but much narrower; carapace very slightly granulated; merus and dactylus of pereopods elongate. When collected, it was uniformly greyish in colour and was partly overgrown by filamentous algae. The specimen is now deposited in the collections of the Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences, Brussels, I.G. 31764, INV. 100385.

Investigations should be carried out to check if the species occurs even farther north, especially on clean sandy bottoms and shores along the west coast of Scotland.

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