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# Catching crabs, crabs, crabs

Aquaculture Department, Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center

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Mud crabs support a year-round local fishery in coastal mangrove areas, being found throughout the tropics in mangrove regions, estuaries, and coastal waters, living both intertidally and subtidally. Young crabs are found throughout the year; medium-sized crabs appear more abundant in the rainy season. They are caught entirely by artisanal fishermen and over the past ten years, there has been a noticeable decline in its population and now the catch consists of many undersized crabs.

Nowadays, with the destruction of mangrove areas and the declining population of *Scylla* there has been renewed interest among fishermen to grow small crabs and if a pond is well managed, crab fattening can frequently generate income. Stocking rates of ponds

depend on the supply and availability of young crabs; if no crabs are available, then none can be fattened. Mud crabs are easy to sell and transport live. An added feature is that they can be air- or sea-freighted, being a popular delicacy in the Indo-Pacific region.

Until hatchery techniques have been fully researched to rear large numbers of small *Scylla*, crab farming will remain small-scale. Research into other areas such as feeding, molting, and biology is the key to its large scale culture. Meanwhile, small-scale crab farming will continue in Thailand as long as there are natural stocks of young *Scylla* available.

Source: M. Harvey. 1990. *Mud crab culture in Thailand*. INFOFISH International 6/90.

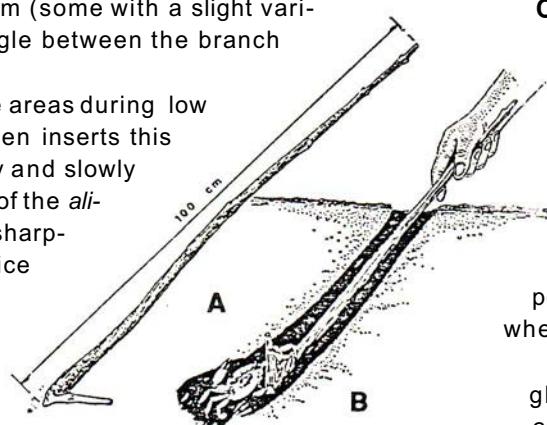
# Catching crabs, crabs, crabs

Six kinds of crabbing devices in the Philippines are illustrated and described:

## Crab nook

The crab hook, locally known as *panukot*, is made of the branch of mangrove tree with a hook. The branch measures 100-cm long and the hook (twig) 8 cm (some with a slight variation), and the angle between the branch and twig is 40°.

At mangrove areas during low tide, local fishermen inserts this crab hook carefully and slowly to the hole or nest of the *ali-mango*. When the sharpened tip of the device touched the crab usually at the end of the hole, the crab may instantaneously grasp the hook by one of its huge pincers



Crab hook: side view (A); method of operation (B).

due probably to its aggressive nature, and this response will be immediately detected by the skillful man. Then he slowly starts to withdraw the hook. He sometimes quickly blocks the hole with a sharp digging blade when the crab is about to appear at the mouth to prevent its escape towards the inner portion of the hole.

## Crab circular net

The crab circular net, locally known as *takiao*, consists of cotton or abaca fiber nettings (2.5 cm mesh size) and a piece of bamboo ring. The gear has enough netting material to form a pocket in which a crab is entangled when it comes out.

The device is used to catch ghost crabs known as *biokoy*, *agokoy*, or *torokoy* dwelling in sandy beaches. The fisherman covers the hole of the crab in the evening with the net, inserting its pocket into the hole. When this

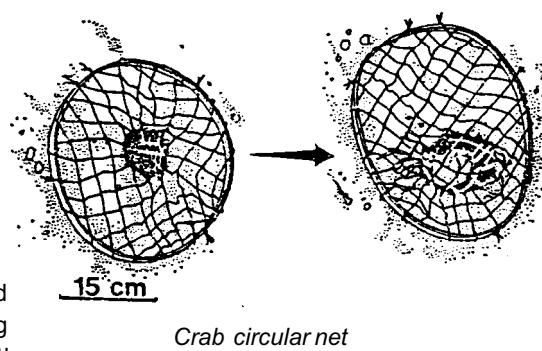
this nocturnal crab comes out to search for food, it is entangled with the net and hence can be collected the following morning.

### Crab tube trap

This skillfully designed trap, locally called *patibong*, consists of a large bamboo trunk (36-cm long; 10-cm outer dia.) with three pieces of bamboo slats attached by a piece of rattan string. One bamboo slat slightly touches the upper end of the trunk near the open end and the other is inserted near the blind end; both have loose contact with each other. The former is tightly pulled downward by the tension of the rattan (or sometimes synthetic) string generated by the bowing of the third bamboo slat.

In the afternoon (mostly towards the evening), or sometimes during rainy days, the crab catcher sets this device at a muddy bank of fishpond or mangrove dikes. The entrance portion is inserted to the outlet of a crab hole. When crab carelessly steps into the bamboo trunk, the animal eventually touches the bamboo slat set near the end of the trunk, instantaneously pulling down another slat and trapping the crab. The next day, the crab is harvested.

As gathered from the people, the device is originally invented to trap the land crab, locally named *kagang*, *kuray*, or *ungkoy*, but they sometimes trap the mud lobster locally called *palatak*, *kolokoy*, *uson*, or *manla*.



Crab circular net

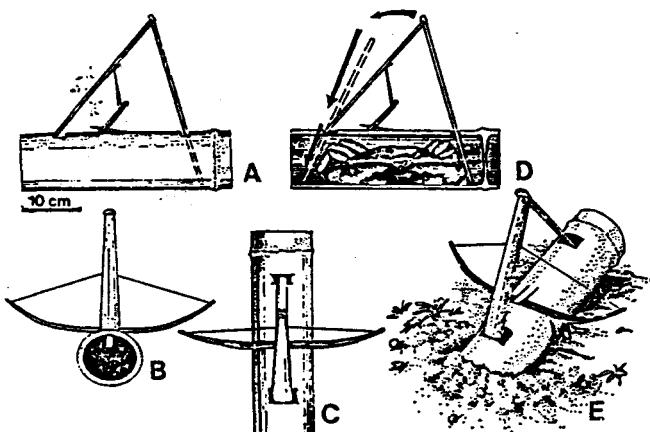
### Crab lift net

The crab lift net, locally known as *bin-tol*, is made of abaca ropes, two pieces of bamboo slats in addition to a short bamboo trunk. A kind of dipping device, the net is usually knitted by hands with the meshes varying from 3 to 6 cm<sup>2</sup>. Stone weights are sometimes attached at each corner to make the sinking of the net quicker and to ensure the right position on the bottom. The net has a depth of about 15 cm. It is baited with a trash fish or a head of a salted fish which is replaced each time the net is lifted. It is generally dropped from a dugout (locally called *banca*). The baited trap is usually set on the sandy bottom of shallow sea for capturing swimming crabs locally called *alimasag* or *suga-suga*, or on the muddy bottoms of mangrove swamps or estuaries for capturing the mangrove crabs and other portunids known as *dawat*. After a while, the fisherman picks up the bamboo float, then suddenly lifts the net to the surface.

It is strange to hear that while the net is being hauled, the crab does not run out of the net despite its shallow and simple construction. According to fishermen, this is probably due to shock. In general, the chance to trap crab(s) might be said to be poor since the catching effort is only made periodically.

### Crab basket trap

The crab basket trap, called *panggal*, is made of many pieces of bamboo slats, a rattan rope, a bamboo trunk, and stones. It is six-sided or circular in shape with one opening at the top. Commonly used crab baskets are 15-cm high, 35-cm dia. with the entrance 7-cm wide in the center of the device. The entrance is cir-



Crab tube trap: side view (A); front view (B); top view (C); inner view (D); method of operation (E).

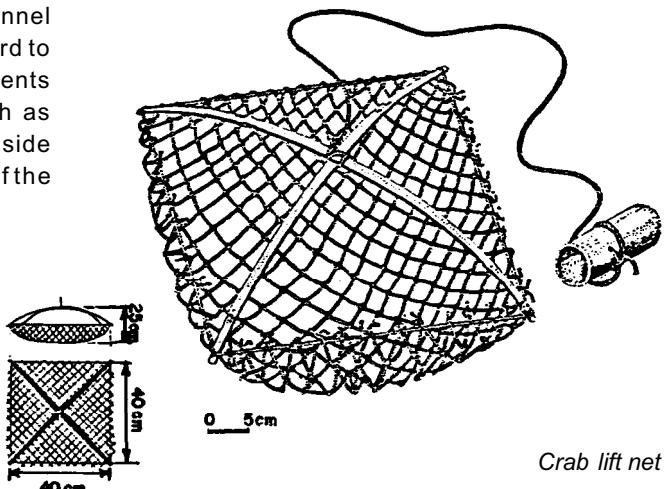
cular with a collar, sometimes with a funnel made of bamboo slats which project inward to allow crabs to enter the basket, but prevents them from escaping. Stone weights such as the sinker are usually attached to the outer side of the device for the same purpose as that of the *bintol*. It is baited with stale meat or head of salted fish.

The basket is set mostly in shallow water and sometimes in brackishwater areas, aimed to trap swimming crabs. The device is thrown out of the dugout to the bottom of the crabbing area in the evening. The following morning, the fisherman pulls the rope of the strong rattan or Manila rope through a bamboo float at its free end. Then he examines and takes out the crab trapped through the entrance.

This device is often utilized by fishermen who are engaged in handline fishing, that is, as a live box for living bait. In this case, it is called *palanan*, meaning receptacle for bait.

### Crab cage trap

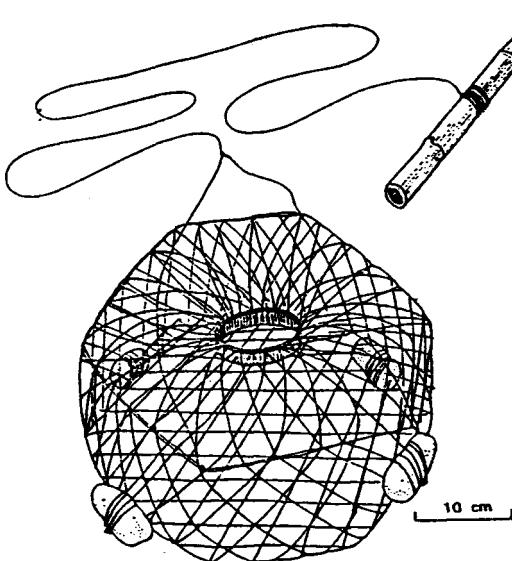
The crab cage trap, locally known as *pangay*, is rigid and is made of some 24 pieces of bamboo slats 60-cm long in addition to sharply pointed ones and several pieces of rattan. It is cylindrical (60-cm long; 22-cm dia.). Both ends of the cage are tightly capped with rattan circles which are furnished with sharp



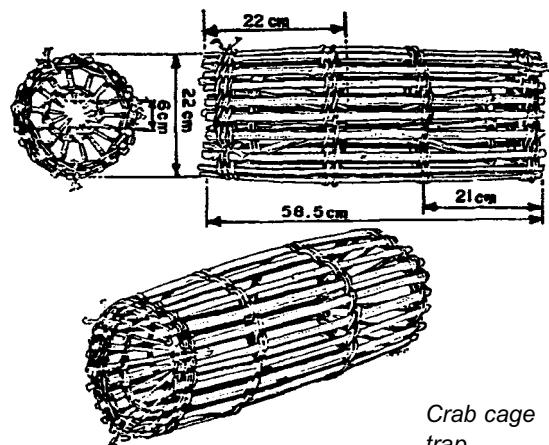
*Crab lift net*

pieces of bamboo slats as a funnel, allowing crabs to enter the cage. The narrow inner end of the funnel is supported by tied rattan. Even if the trapped crab tries to escape through one of the openings from inside, it can not go out since there is a funnel or fishing head of bamboo pieces recessed.

This cage trap, sometimes baited; is used in brackishwater areas such as mangrove creeks. In the evening, fisherman sets this device forming a line at his favorite place. As crabs are generally nocturnal, he examines each trap the following morning and when he finds crab(s), he unties one of the rattan circles to remove it. After getting crab(s), he attaches the circle as before.



*Crab basket trap*



*Crab cage trap*

Source: H.Motoh. 1983. *Traditional devices for capturing crabs used in the Philippines today*. **Researches on Crustacea** No. 12. Carcinological Society of Japan.