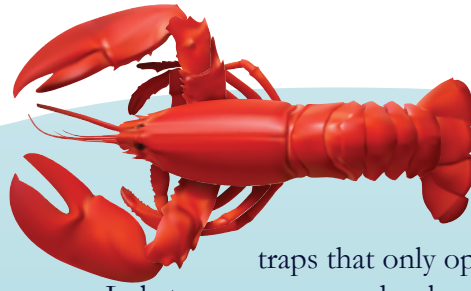


# Lobster



Lobsters are a type of crustacean. They have a hard exoskeleton, a skeleton that is on the outside of a creature's body instead of inside like a human, that covers their whole body in sections. Lobsters are also **invertebrates**, which means they have no vertebral column, or spine. Lobsters shed, or moult, their old exoskeleton as they get bigger and grow a new one. Lobsters have 10 legs. They are well known for their large claws on the front pair of legs, but actually have smaller claws on the next two sets behind the front as well.

Lobsters are **bilaterally symmetrical**, which means if you split them down the middle, each side would be a mirror image of the other. The antennae on their heads help lobsters feel their way around the murky bottom of the ocean. They can also smell their prey with sensing hairs on the front of their heads. Lobsters live in every ocean of the world. Lobsters are omnivores (meaning they will eat any kind of food) and bottom feeders. They eat mainly fish, molluscs, other crustaceans, worms, and some plants.

Lobsters usually walk slowly on the ocean floor, but if they are startled they can swim backwards by curling and uncurling their muscular tails and abdomens. The top speed recorded for a lobster swimming is 11 miles

per hour! To catch lobsters, people use traps that only open one way.

Lobster was once used only as low-quality food for poor people and servants, or as fertilizer. People now pay high prices for a meal of lobster tail and claws.

Lobsters have an enzyme called **telomerase** that repairs their DNA. Biologists say it keeps lobsters from weakening with age. If they do not get sick, eaten, or injured, lobsters might be able to just keep living! They can even regrow legs if they lose them. Lobsters keep growing the longer they are alive.

Guinness World Records states that the largest caught lobster was 44.4 pounds and was thought to be 50 years old. As recent as 2012, researchers found a way to measure lobsters' age by counting rings on the lobster's eyestalks and a stomach part. They are also studying telomerase in lobsters for anti-aging and cancer treatments, as this enzyme not only decreases in most animals, but can become cancerous if activated beyond its normal life span.

Professor Jelle Atema of Boston University has a 15-pound lobster in captivity that he is studying to see just how long it will live. Who knows how long it can live and how big it will get?

1. **New terms:** See how these three terms are used in the text, and write a definition next to each one.

**invertebrate**

**bilaterally symmetrical**

**telomerase**

2. How big is the largest recorded lobster? How old was it? \_\_\_\_\_

3. Lobsters get weak as they get older.

**True or False?**

4. Lobsters cannot swim.

**True or False?**