

State nabs 10 for taking too many crabs

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June 3, 2007

Each spring during the high tides of the new and full moons, horseshoe crabs line local shores to spawn. Ten local fishermen, some under cover of night, seized this annual ritual as a money-making opportunity: They were caught over-harvesting horseshoe crabs, which are highly prized by the biomedical industry for their blood, officials said.

The state Department of Environmental Conservation has charged the fishermen with violating environmental conservation laws, including unpermitted taking and harvesting more than the allowable limit from the waters and beaches in Brookhaven, Smithtown and Islip towns. Several tickets for operating vessels at night without lights also were issued.

David Hartmann, 28, of East Patchogue, was charged with a felony for possessing a catch that had more than 1,500 horseshoe crabs over the limit and fishing without a permit, the DEC said. Paul Sharkey, 28, of Quogue, was charged on Wednesday with a misdemeanor for having more than the allowable limit of horseshoe crabs and then again on Thursday with a felony for being over the allowable limit, with more than 1,500 horseshoe crabs over the limit, according to the DEC.

If the value of the catch is over \$250, the charge is a misdemeanor; if the value is over \$1500; the charge is upgraded to a felony, the DEC said. The following fishermen were charged with misdemeanors: Ken Wolfe, 42, of Islip; Ronald Parry, 49, of Islip; and Michael Mason, 42, of East Islip. Edward Kattar, 25, of Patchogue, and Richard Winkler, 50, of Miller Place, were both ticketed for fishing without a permit. Joseph Drago was issued a written warning for fishing without a permit, according to the DEP.

The two-day investigation commenced on Wednesday with environmental conservation officers and members of the marine enforcement unit in marked and unmarked vehicles and two patrol vessels. The DEC had gotten complaints that people were taking the gentle horseshoe crabs as they made nests on local beaches.

Not really a crab, the horseshoe crab is related to spiders, ticks and scorpions. Its blood, which is blue and copper-based, plays a vital role in injectable medications. The special cells in the blood are used by the pharmaceutical and medical-device industries to guard against bacterial contamination in intravenous drugs, vaccines, and medical devices. The exoskeleton of the crab is used in hair spray, contact lenses and skin creams, experts say.

On May 13, environmental conservation officers charged James Harkins, 42, of Medford, and James Fields, 33, of Patchogue, with fishing without a permit and having more than the daily-allowed amount of horseshoe crabs, after they docked their vessel in the Great South Bay and off-loaded the crabs to Jeffrey Mannheimer, 34, of Medford, a shipper and dealer with Jmann Seafood in East Patchogue. Mannheimer was cited for purchasing seafood from unlicensed fishermen. Fields also was cited for speeding and having improper registration numbers on his vessel, according to the DEP. None of those charged could be reached for comment.

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