

FIRST STATE SYMBOLOGY

STATE MARINE ANIMAL



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The horseshoe crab has been around 450 million years.

Horseshoe crab, longtime resident

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SPECIAL TO THE NEWS JOURNAL

Scientific name: *Limulus polyphemus*. *Limulus* is Latin for "slanting or crooked," and *Polyphemus* was the one-eyed son of Poseidon. "Their name is all about their vision," horseshoe crab expert Glenn Gauvry said, referring to their big cluster of eyes and secondary eyes to the side.

The backstory: Lewes resident Abigail Bradley was 17 and had already done research on horseshoe crabs when she made the request for the symbol. The

designation happened on June 25, 2002, and she continued her interest with studies in biology, earning a degree at the University of Delaware.

Delaware Bay is the home to more horseshoe crabs than any other place in the world, a fact recognized in the designation. But for how long?

"Horseshoe crabs have survived for 450 million years, largely without human intervention, but their future is unknown," said Gauvry, a Little Creek resident who in 1995 founded the Ecological Research & Development Group to advocate for the world's four horseshoe crab species (the others are in Asia). "They won't survive indifference."

Here's one simple way to help: Flip over crabs you see stranded upside down. Other approaches — like preserving their spawning habitats and harvesting fewer for bait — are more complicated.

Horseshoe crabs are of particular interest to medicine, the group writes on <http://horseshoecrab.org>, its helpful and thorough site. Horseshoe crabs are used in eye research (their 10 eyes have a complex structure similar to ours) and to make surgical sutures and wound dressings for burn victims, the group says. But perhaps most important is a component of their blue blood called *limulus* amoebocyte lysate, which detects bacterial endotoxins that could contaminate drugs and intravenous devices.

Where you can find it: In the Delaware Bay, all year. May and June is spawning time. Their eggs form a critical food source for migratory birds, with a dozen species stopping in the Delaware Bay as they fly between the Arctic and South America. It's part of a state symbols exhibit at the Delaware Museum of Natural History.

DID YOU KNOW?

They're not crabs but are *Merostomata*, which means "legs attached to the mouth." They are most closely related to trilobites that existed 544 million years ago.