

## Horseshoe Crab

Horseshoe crabs (*Limulus polyphemus*) are arthropods; part of the largest group of living animals that includes insects, spiders, scorpions and crabs. Horseshoe crabs are not true crabs. They are more closely related to spiders and scorpions because they lack antennae and mandibles. Unlike true crabs, horseshoe crabs have book gills, a breathing organ found in many arachnids; chelicera, an anterior pair of appendages in arachnids; and 5 pairs of legs.

Horseshoe crabs are found in the Gulf of Mexico and along the north Atlantic coast of North America. They grow up to be 24 inches long and live for 20 to 25 years. A females lays 15,000 to 64,000 eggs at one time depending on her body size.

Fossils of horseshoe crabs date back 360 million years ago. They evolved in shallow seas with other primitive arthropods called trilobites, an extinct relative of the horseshoe crab. Horseshoe crabs are considered living fossils because their external appearance has remained almost unchanged for the last 350 to 400 million years.

