

DISTRIBUTION OF CRAYFISH SPECIES IN LATVIA

Inese Briede

University of Daugavpils

Address: Vienības street. 13, LV 5400, Riga, Latvia

e-mail: inesebriede28@inbox.lv

Latvia is rich in water bodies. There are four large rivers, more than 3000 lakes, ponds and streams. The total area of water reservoirs occupies more than 60000 km², most of them are favourable for crayfish life. There were recognized four crayfish species in Latvia - noble crayfish (*Astacus astacus*), narrow-clawed crayfish (*Astacus leptodactylus*), the North American signal crayfish (*Pacifastacus leniusculus*) and spiny – cheek crayfish (*Orconectes limosus*).

The beginning of crayfish breeding was dated since the last century. The main crayfish population at that time was the noble crayfish (*Astacus astacus*) and it represents significant economic value. The crayfish breeding was growing up till 1930, when unknown disease eradicated many crayfish populations. From years 1926 till 2005 in 74 lakes in Latvia artificial crayfish propagating were prepared.

The noble crayfish is the only native species and at present is distributed throughout Latvia. The population of noble crayfish were found in 220 locations (Arens & Taugbøl, 2005). The noble crayfish is widely distributed in Europe countries such as Belaruss, Estonia, Lithuania, Denmark, Norway, Poland, Finland, Switzerland, Ukraine, German, Sweden and in separated areas of Siberia. In 2009 the noble crayfish were found in 129 lakes or 84,9 % from all lakes (Birzaks, unpublished data).

Narrow-clawed crayfish (*Astacus leptodactylus*) was reported since 1960 and this population is distributed in separate water bodies in Daugavpils, Madona, Dobeles and Riga regions. The population of narrow – clawed crayfish was found in 34 localities and 8 of them were mixed with noble crayfish population (Arens & Taugbøl, 2005). Narrow-clawed crayfish is disseminated in Belaruss, Denmark, France, Italy, Russia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Finland, Turkey and Ukraine. In 2009 the narrow crayfish was found in 25 lakes or 16,4% from all lakes (Birzaks, unpublished data)..

The North American signal crayfish (*Pacifastacus leniusculus*) was imported from Lithuania in 1971 and introduced in Brasla river but in 1983 in a lake Primmas in Limbazi region, but in 2004 the signal crayfish population was expanded in 4 localities (Arens & Taugbøl, 2005). The population of signal crayfish is widely distributed in Sweden, Finland, England, France, Portugal, Spain, Marocco. The population of signal crayfish is very aggressive and resistant against crayfish plague and other diseases. It is one of the reasons why this population is so widely distributed and it serves as a disease carrier.

In 2006 one more species was registered– spiny – cheek crayfish (*Orconectes limosus*) in Lielupe river basin. The population of spiny – cheek crayfish is widely disseminated in Belaruss, Lithuania and in other Europe countries. It is resistant against crayfish plague and aggressive against other crayfish species. In 2009 the North American signal crayfish and spiny – cheek crayfish were found in one location each (Birzaks, unpublished data).



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References

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