Horn-eyed ghost crab

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Why in News?

Visakhapatnam researchers recently documented the first confirmed instance of a horn-eyed ghost crab preying on a Mottled Lightfoot crab along the Rushi Konda shoreline suggests a temporary merging of habitats where sand and stone occur in close succession.

> *Mottled Lightfoot crab is a species that occupies rocky crevices and does not ordinarily cross paths with its sand-dwelling counterpart.*

- **Scientific Name -** Ocypode ceratophthalmus.
- **Genus -** Ocypode.
- It is a ***fast-running, sand-colored crab*** commonly found on tropical and subtropical beaches of the Indian Ocean and western Pacific — including India's coastline.
- **Key identification features**
  - **"Horns" on eyes** - Each eye has a pointed extension (a style) on top — the crab's trademark.
  - **Color-** Pale sandy to grey; blends well with beach sand (excellent camouflage).
  - **Size -** Carapace up to ~5–6 cm wide.
  - **Build -** Long legs; built for speed on open sand.



- **Habitat -** It is generally restricted to sandy zones, above the high-tide line.
- Digs deep, slanting burrows for shelter and moisture.
- **Behavior** - Their pale bodies blend easily with sand, a feature that, along with their swift movement at dusk and dawn, has given rise to their common name.
- Mostly nocturnal; active at dusk and night.
- Breathes using modified gills and can stay out of water for long periods.
- **Diet -** They have been recorded hunting clams, snails, worms, isopods, shrimps and a variety of insects.
- In some regions, they feed on the eggs and hatchlings of birds and turtles. They also prey on other crabs, including smaller hermit crabs.
- **Ecological importance -** Cleans beaches by scavenging dead matter.
- **Indicator species -** Healthy ghost-crab populations often reflect low beach disturbance.
- Aerates sand through burrowing, aiding nutrient cycling.

Six species of ghost crabs have been reported along the Indian coastline, and at least 3 of these have been observed at Rushikonda Beach, including O. brevicornis, O. macrocera and O. cordimanus.

Reference

[The Hindu | Horn-eyed ghost crab]



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