

COCONUT CRABS

Closely related to lobsters, and called *krab kokonas* in Bislama, the coconut crab is a speciality of most of Vanuatu's more upmarket restaurants. Inevitably, this has led to a serious decline in crab numbers and strict conservation measures are now required. The species matures very slowly, taking 15 years to reach harvesting size. It can live for 50 years and grows to have a leg span of 1m, making it the world's largest land crab.

The crab is so named because it eats coconut flesh, among other things – it's mainly a scavenger. However, a nut first has to be damaged, perhaps by a rat gnawing through the shell, before the crab can begin nibbling through to the meat. It's said that they'll climb palms and break off the nuts, some of which will split when they hit the ground.

Coconut crabs generally live in forested areas within about 1km of the sea, although they can be found much farther away. Villagers catch them quite easily by fixing split-open coconuts to the ground then checking the baits with a torch at night. While they can pick the crabs up without being crunched by their nippers, don't try it yourself – an adult crab will have no difficulty taking your finger off.

Coconut crabs offer an enjoyable gastronomic experience, and provide many poor villagers with an income. However, if you're concerned about the species' survival you should eat something else.

With the serious decline of coconut crabs and the inevitable eradication of this creature, White Grass Ocean Resort has made it their policy to remove coconut crab from their menu. However, in turn, we have undertaken to dedicate an area of the Resort as a habitat for guest enjoyment to view the coconut crab in their natural environment.

We hope you understand and join us in our endeavour.

Thank you,

John and Silvana Nicholls