

Notes on the taxonomy of *Potamonautes obesus* (A Milne-Edwards, 1868) and *Potamonautes calcaratus* (Gordon, 1929) (Brachyura: Potamoidea: Potamonautidae) from eastern and southern Africa

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Abstract

The East African freshwater crab *Potamonautes obesus* (A Milne-Edwards, 1868) (family Potamonautidae) is redescribed from a large series of specimens from Tanzania and Somalia, and *Potamonautes (Potamonautes) bottegoi* de Man, 1898 is judged to be a junior objective synonym of *P. obesus*. The related taxon, *Potamonautes calcaratus* (Gordon, 1929) from Mozambique and South Africa, is recognised here as a valid species and is redescribed from type material. The distributions of *P. obesus* and *P. calcaratus* are described and discussed.

Key words: Crustacea, Brachyura, Potamoidea, Potamonautidae, *Potamonautes*, freshwater crab, taxonomy, East Africa, southern Africa

Introduction

The present study aims to stabilize the taxonomy of *P. obesus* (A Milne-Edwards, 1868), a commonly encountered and widespread species of East African freshwater crab. This species is morphologically thought to be closely related to two other described taxa, *Potamonautes (Potamonautes) bottegoi* de Man, 1898 and *Potamonautes (Potamonautes) calcaratus* Gordon, 1929, and identification of specimens that are superficially similar to *Potamonautes obesus* is often confusing and uncertain (Cumberlidge 1997, 1998). Part of the reason for this confusion (it is argued here) is that *P. obesus* exhibits a great deal of intraspecific variation, especially in male specimens. This type of intraspecific morphological differentiation is known to be common in freshwater crabs from southern Africa (Daniels *et al.* 2001). For example, the molts that occur in adult males of *P. obesus* (cw 43 mm and above) bring about a transformation of the major cheliped that is unusual in African freshwater crabs.