

YZC Animal of the Month, July 2010

## Giant Spider Crab

*Macrocheira kaemferi*



One of the stars of the entrance case in the museum is the Japanese Giant Spider Crab. It has a whopping leg span of over a metre. Even this is not the largest individual recorded for this species, which can reach a leg span of 3.8m across and weigh up to 20kg. This is really a giant of the invertebrate world, and the largest living arthropod (invertebrates with jointed limbs, a group that includes insects, crustaceans, millipedes, centipedes, spiders, scorpions, and the extinct trilobites).

The Giant Spider Crab is a crustacean – it is a spider-like crab not a crab-like spider. The Crustacea is a diverse group

of animals, with over 50,000 species known. It includes familiar animals such as crabs, lobsters, shrimps, prawns and woodlice, and as well as barnacles, bizarre copepods with their single central eye, and small, transparent Daphnia confusingly known as water fleas despite not being insects.

The crab spider in the museum has lost much of its colour. In life it would have been orange with white spots. But you can still see the rough surface of its hard armour – its exoskeleton – that protected it from predators. Giant Spider Crabs are thought to live for up to 100 years, and feed on other invertebrates, dead animals and algae.