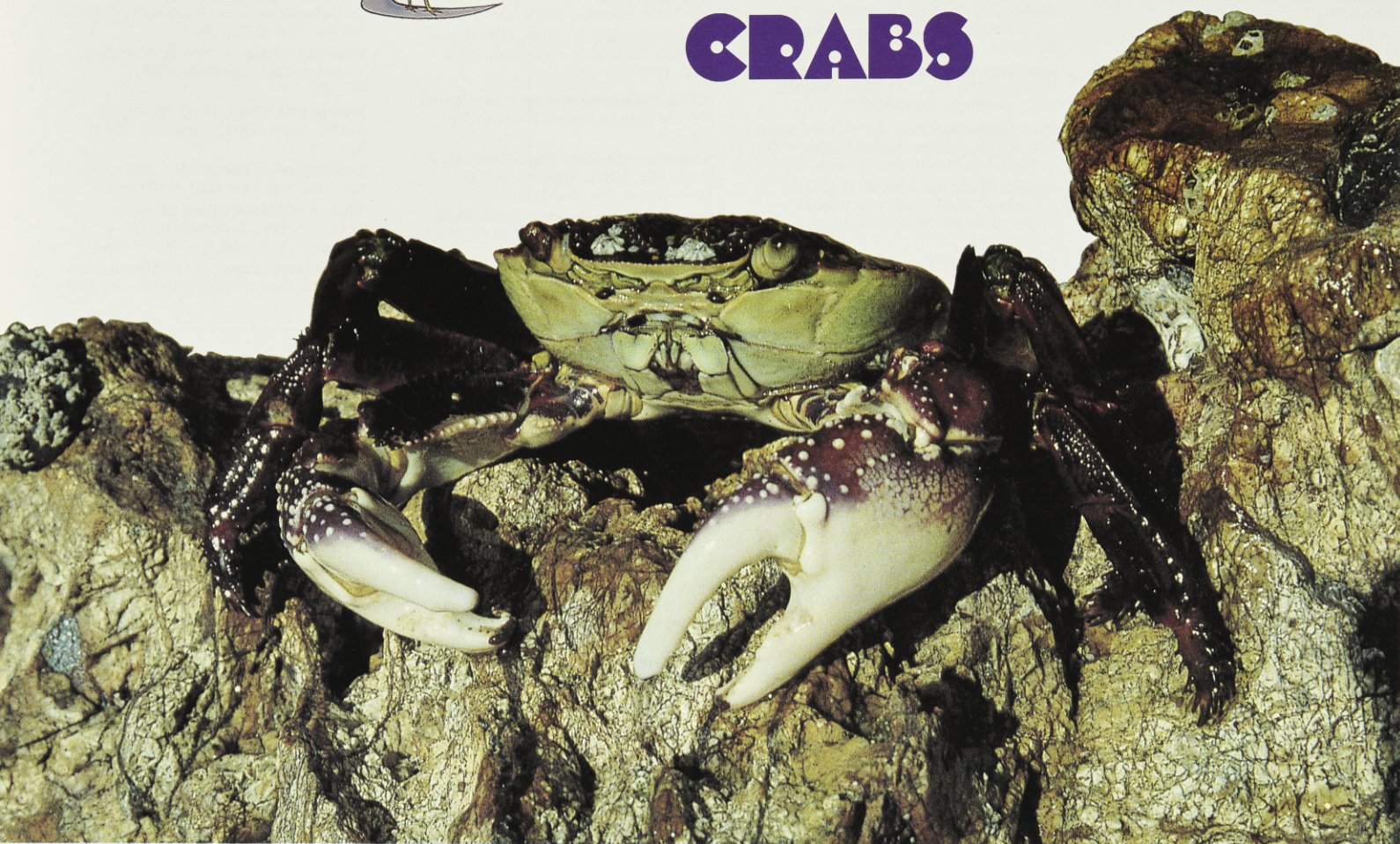
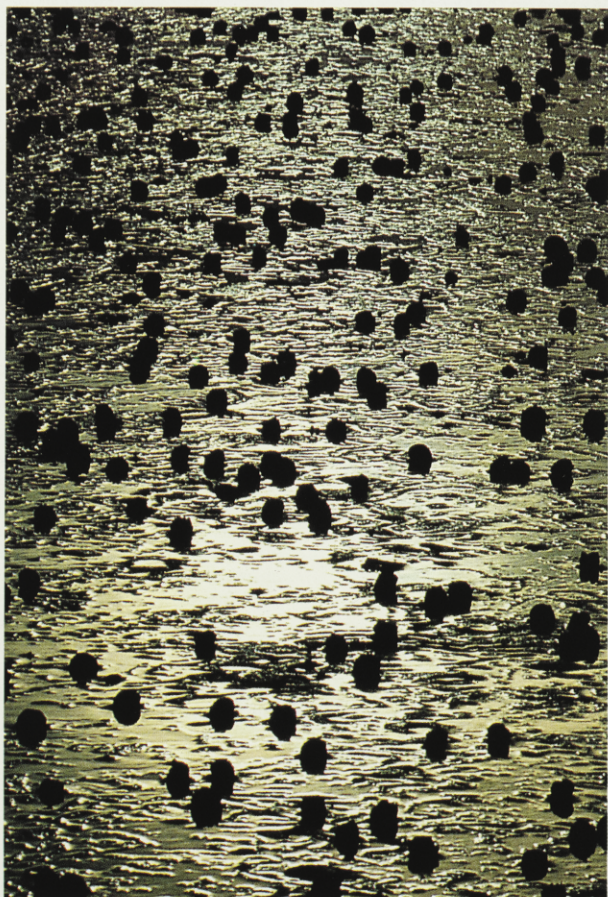


## IN DEFENCE OF CRABS



*The purple rock crab frequently eats other purple rock crabs and climbs out of the sea at night to eat landsnails.*



**B**eaches and rocky shores are wonderful places to visit or live near, but for some animals, like our native crabs, survival on the seacoast can be quite difficult. A crab's life is full of danger. Fish, seabirds, kingfishers and people all eat them.

Crabs protect themselves in lots of different ways. Their thick, heavy shell-like cover — called a carapace — works like a suit of armour and many use their strong pincer claws to frighten or attack their enemies. Anyone who has been nipped by one will tell you that a crab's pincers are very powerful for their size.

But not all crabs are fierce. Some such as the little native tunnelling mud crab dart quickly sideways into their holes at the slightest hint of danger. New Zealand's two other common mud crabs, the hairy-handed crab and the stalk-eyed crab, are also timid despite their ferocious sounding names. Both are quick to take advantage of the burrowing skills of their cousin, and often take over the tunnelling crab's hole.

When threatened some crabs such as the swimming crabs burrow backwards into the sand. They use their rear paddle-like legs as shovels to rapidly sink themselves into the sand, leaving only their eyes and feelers protruding.

Some crabs hide under stones, especially at low tide. If you carefully lift up damp rocks you can sometimes uncover the cancer crab which has a piecrust-edged carapace. Other crabs like the large shore crab creep into narrow rock crevices and are nearly impossible to dislodge.

Several small crabs, like the secretive hairy crab, will stop moving when disturbed.