

Illustration © Richard McKenna

1 Western Rock Lobster (*Panulirus cygnus*) juveniles live on shallow inshore reefs and seagrass meadows, where they grow through a series of moults over 3-4 years.

2 In late spring, sub-adult lobsters undergo a synchronised moult, changing their normal red shell colour to a creamy white/pale pink. Known as 'whites', these lobsters then migrate in large groups at night to spawning grounds in deep water. Their red colour returns a few months later.

3 Western rock lobster mature at 6-7 years of age. Mating occurs in late winter to spring, where the male attaches a packet of sperm, known as a 'tarspot', to the underside of the female between the hind most legs. When females mature, they develop setae on their swimmerettes, known as setose.



Tarspot

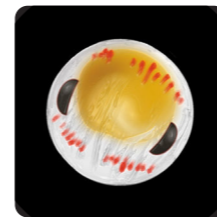


Fully setose female swimmerettes

4 Female lobsters develop eggs around September to February. The eggs are fertilised using the tarspot as they are swept backwards and become attached to the sticky setae (fine hairs) on the swimmerettes beneath the tail. Females carrying eggs are known as 'berried'.



Berried female



Lobster egg with visible eye stems

5 The eggs hatch in four to eight weeks, depending on water temperature, releasing 1.8 mm long planktonic larvae called 'phyllosoma' into the water.

6 The phyllosoma drift offshore and spend 9 to 11 months in the open ocean, generally between 400 and 1,000 km off the Western Australian coast. The larvae grow to 35 mm in a series of moults, changing in size and shape in stages. The majority die, but the survivors are eventually carried by winds and ocean currents back towards the continental shelf.

7 The late stage larvae undergo a moult that resembles miniature transparent lobsters known as 'pueruli'. At this stage they swim up to 60 km across the continental shelf with help from prevailing currents, to settle on inshore habitats. Here they quickly develop red colouration and grow to become juvenile rock lobsters.