Modern New Caledonia was discovered by James COOK in 1774 but the marine natural history of this part of the world started really on the second half of the 19th century when naturalist collected samples and corresponded with scientists in Europe. The first comprehensive work on the crabs of New Caledonia is the large study by renowned French carcinologist Alphonse Milne-Edwards between 1872 and 1873 on material collected essentially by the botanist Balansa, in which he recorded 182 species from the following (modern) families: Calappidae, Domeciidae, Eriphiidae, Gecarcinidae, Goneplacidae, Grapsidae, Hymenosomatidae, Leucosiidae, Majidae, Macrophthalmidae, Mictyridae, Ocypodidae, Palaemonidae, Pilumnidae, Pinnothriidae, Plagusiidae, Portunidae, Sesarmidae, Tetraliidae, Trapeziidae, Varunidae and Xanthidae.

Since this important «first» step by A. Milne-Edwards, many more species have since been described by numerous taxonomists. In 1977, the deep-sea slopes were sampled for the first time, revealing a suite of many new species. It was the beginning of the MUSORSTOM epoch and a new era in carcinology. Vast collections of crabs were deposited in the Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle in Paris and, thanks to Alain Crosnier, have been studied by many renowned carcinologists. A large part of the taxonomical studies on these crabs, often published as revisions, were published in the long-running series «Résultats des Campagnes MUSORSTOM», which became «Tropical Deep Sea Benthos» since volume 22.

Some noteworthy studies of crabs of New Caledonia are listed below by families: Calappidae (Galil, 1993, 1997; Crosnier, 1997); Cancridae (Davie, 1991); Cryptochiridae (Manning, 1991); Cycloporippidae and Cymonomidae (Tavares, 1993, 1997); Dorippidae (Chen, 1993); Dromiidae (McLay, 1993); Dynomenidae (McLay, 1999); Goneplacidae (Guinot & Richer de Forges, 1981a; Ng, 2002); Grapsidae (Monod, 1973; Serène, 1973); Homolidae (Griffin & Brown, 1976; Guinot & Richer de Forges, 1981, 1995); Homolodromiidae (Guinot, 1993, 1995); Hymenosomatidae (Davie & Richer de Forges, 1996; Ng & Richer de Forges, 1996); Latreilliidae (Castro et al., 2003); Leucosiidae (Chen, 1989; Tan & Richer de Forges, 1993; Tan & Ng, 1996; Galil, 2001, 2003a-c, 2005); Majidae (Griffin & Brown, 1976; Griffin & Tranter, 1986, Guinot & Richer de Forges, 1981b; 1982a, b; 1986, 1988; Richer de Forges & Guinot, 1989); Matutidae (Galil & Clark, 1994); Palaemonidae (Guinot-Dumontier, 1959; Davie, 1993; Castro et al., 1995; Chia & Ng, 1998, 2000; Ng & Chia, 1999); Plagusiidae (Crosnier, 2001); Portunidae (Moosa, 1996; Ng, 2000; Crosnier, 2002, 2003; Davie & Crosnier, 2006); Retroplumidae (McLay, 2006); Trapezidae (Galil & Clark, 1990; Castro, 1997); and Xanthidae (Guinot, 1971; Crosnier, 1987; Davie, 1997; Tan & Ng, 1994; Ng, 1993; Clark & Ng, 1999).

The present check list includes 558 species of crabs recorded from New Caledonia. The area considered includes the Loyalty Islands, Chesterfield and Bellona Plateau and Lord Howe seamounts. Matthew & Hunter Islands as well as the Norfolk Ridge seamounts. Of course, there are many more species living there, collected but still unstudied. In particular the large families of Majidae and Xanthidae have several common species unlisted. In any case, the known diversity of New Caledonia is very impressive. Japan and China has some 800 plus species each (Dai & Yang, 1991; Sakai, 1976). Comparing island systems, the 558 species now known from New Caledonia compares very favourably with Taiwan with 550 species (Ng et al., 2001) and Guam and Micronesia with 401 species (Paulay et al., 2003). French Polynesia alone has 380 species (http://decapoda.free.fr; Poupin, 1998). With regards to their biogeographical affinities, the crabs of New Caledonia are clearly from the Indo-Pacific province and have many species in common with NE coast of Australia and SE Asia.
Some interesting stories about the discovery of crabs in New Caledonia are following.

**Mursia musortomia** Galil, 1993
This family, often called box crabs (primarily due to the most speciose genus, *Calappa*), is characterised by dimorphic chelae – one has a special tooth for «cutting» open shells (gastropods), the other with long slender fingers to pull out the exposed gastropod. Interestingly, the cutting chela is almost always right-handed. The reason is simple – the right-handed cutter works best when the shell has the opening (the aperture) on the right as well. This situation is reminiscent of tools designed for use for right-handed people. For example, can-openers are best used by right-handed people who can apply the best leverage. Left-handed people have a terrible time using normal can-openers. In the sea, hunters (crabs) and hunted (gastropods) are engaged in an arms race! The shells have the opening on the right, the crabs have evolved the relevant weapon to deal with it! Remarkably, this connection was only discovered in 1984!

**Paradynomena quasimodo** McLay and Ng, 2004
The sea is full of cryptic species – i.e. forms which are difficult to separate. This is compounded by the difficulty in collecting many supposedly rare species, the resultant paucity of specimens making the taxonomist’s job even more difficult. Often, when enough material becomes available because of new methods, many problems are solved, and «suddenly», many species get discovered! The strange dynomenid genus *Paradynomena* is a case in point. Even until the mid-1990s, only one species was recognised – *P. tuberculata*. Good collections from the Philippines forced a rethink of its taxonomy – as a result, six species are now recognised – of which three occur in New Caledonia. One species, is named after the French character of literary legend – Quasimodo – because of the many humps on its back!

**Parapilumnus cristimanus** (A. Milne-Edwards, 1873)
Rarity is an illusion. Most animals are rare because we simply do not know where they live, or are unable to catch them! Until less than a decade ago, *Pilumnus cristimanus*, a hairy crab named by the great French carcinologist Alphonse Milne-Edwards in 1873 was known only from two female specimens and long regarded as a pilumnid crab. When males were finally found in the South China Sea and males of a related species discovered in Guam – our views changed completely. The diagnostic male characters showed that the species needed to be transferred to another genus (*Parapilumnus*) and they belong to a separate family (Goneplacidae). And why are these crabs so «cryptic»? Simple – they live deep in the rubble zone – where few scientists can or bother to sample intensely!

**Dolos petraells** (Milne Edwards, 1874)
Crabs have a myriad of ways to hide from potential predators. In the mid-1990s, a Singapore researcher and French scientist found that the strange leucosiid, *Tlos petraells* had a habit of hiding among dead pieces of the calcareous algae *Halimeda*. This observation solved a long-standing question about this peculiar animal - why did it look an eroded piece of coral rubble of a particular size and shape? The answer was simple – they were mimicking the dead pieces of *Halimeda*! With this knowledge, more specimens were found, and subsequent studies showed that the species proved so strange that it needed its own genus – *Dolos*.

**Discoplax longipes** A. Milne-Edwards, 1867
Land crabs are always interesting – they are obvious, often quite large and sometimes edible. Until the 1990s, one of the least understood land crabs was a species everyone was calling *Cardisoma longipes*. Supposedly described from New Caledonia, scientists never did find the species there and there was uncertainty. The species was found in some other small Pacific karst islands, but never
common. Things moved fast in the late 1990s when the species was better understood – they like karst formations, living in the vegetation, and are nocturnal. The reason why they were never found on New Caledonia (where they were supposedly discovered from) was that the label was inaccurate. They were common in the nearby Loyalty Islands – which are karsts! A French expedition deep into the caves found them in good numbers! More were then found in Guam. To make the story even more interesting, in a joint study, French and Singapore researchers named a new allied species from karst caves in the Philippines, and showed that the genus *Discoplax* – erected by Milne-Edwards in 1867 – but sunk under *Cardisoma* by workers for decades – was in fact a good genus!

*Odiomaris pilosus* (A. Milne-Edwards, 1873)

Some one-sixth of the world’s crab species are true freshwater crabs – i.e. they spend their entire life in this medium. New Caledonia, being so old and isolated, does not host any of the major freshwater crab groups. To fill the niche, one group of spider crabs have evolved to take advantage of this «empty» niche. Because there is almost no competition and no major crustacean predators (like other freshwater crabs!), *Odiomaris pilosus* has grown large – it is the largest freshwater hymenosomatid crab known – and in some drainages, is a dominant species. The species was long placed in the genus *Amarinus*, but recent studies by French, Singapore and Australian scientists showed the species deserved its own genus. Moreover, a second species (*O. estuarius*) with more marine tendencies was also discovered and named!

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* Calappa cypleata (Borradaile, 1903)
* Calappa depressa Miens, 1886
* Calappa gallus (Herbst, 1803)
* Calappa hepatica (Linne, 1758)
* Calappa lophos (Herbst, 1782)
* Calappa philargiis (Linne, 1758)
* Mursia armata de Haan, 1837
* Mursia australiensis Carapbell, 1971
* Mursia longispina Crosnier, 1997
* Mursia microspina Davie & Short, 1989
* Mursia musortomia Galil, 1993
* Mursia trispiniosa Parisi, 1914
CAMPTANDRIIDAE Stimpson, 1858  
*Nanusia starnuehleri* (Pretzmann, 1968)  

CANCRIIDAE Latreille, 1803  
*Platepistoma nanum* Davie, 1991  

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