



Image courtesy:
Department of Fisheries, Western Australia.

FACTSHEET

Hermit Crab



Hermit Crab



Common Name: Hermit Crabs

Scientific Name: *Paguroidea*

Habitat: Sandy floors, Seagrass meadows, Rocky shores, Coral reefs.

Description:

Unlike other crabs, the hermit crab has a soft unprotected abdomen. They protect this by living inside other shells. When the animal is retracted inside the shell, only its claws remain outside and can be used like a tightly fitting door. The left claw is usually equal in size or slightly larger than the right.

Diet:

Algae and plankton.

In the wild:

Hermit crabs live in shells discarded by sea snails that have died. However, they may pull out the live snail, getting a new house and a feast as well. Hermit crabs don't live in the same shell all their lives; they replace their 'borrowed' shell as they moult and grow. Larger animals most often inhabit

Campanile shells, while juveniles utilise a number of different smaller shells.

To find a new shell, they line up next to it and quickly move from the old home into the new home. Due to its soft abdomen, hermit crabs are very vulnerable to being eaten and hence this is the only time they will leave their shell.

Hermit crabs, like other crabs are scavengers. This means they will eat just about anything, but typically feed on seaweed or dead animal matter. They use their strong nippers to tear apart their food and place it into their mouth.

Hermit crabs use their legs and front claws to drag themselves across the reef and the sea floor.

To reproduce, the separate sexes release eggs and sperm into the water column. The eggs and sperm meet by chance in the water column and fertilisation occurs. The fertilised egg becomes part of the plankton for some time before it is big enough to swim against the currents.





Threats:

- Human disturbance (taking away shells they need to live, or with them still inside!)
- Pollution

HOW CAN I HELP?

People should leave shells on the beach and not take them away, because hermit crabs need those shells to live in.

DID YOU KNOW?

A hermit crab may pull another crab from the shell it wants! Sometimes hermit crabs gang up on one of their species who they think has a better shell. They will work together to pull the crab out of the shell and then race each other and fight until one of them takes it over.