

Common names

Hermit Crab

Scientific name

Pagurus bernhardus



- **Generally reddish or brownish in colour, sometimes with blue spots, lacking a hard carapace they use any suitable shell for protection.**
- **Average body length longer than occupied shell - 10 and 3.5 cm respectively.**
- **Observed to live up to 20 years (in captivity).**
- **Found throughout the British Isles, occupying rocky and sandy shorelines. Also found in deeper water.**
- **Omnivorous scavenger that can also filter organic material from seawater.**
- **Predators include cuttlefish, squid, octopus and fish.**
- **Both sexes leave their shells to reproduce. Sexual maturity reached in 1 year.**
- **Despite their name, hermit crabs live with others in large colonies.**
- **They not only live in shells but any suitable container, such as a plastic cap or even a large claw from an edible crab!**



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Description

The largest of our hermit crabs, reddish or brownish in colour, sometimes with blue spots, with an average body and shell length of 10cm and 3.5cm respectively. Lacking a hard carapace, it will occupy empty shells including periwinkle and whelk shells (in deeper water). When outside the shell the crab has a strange appearance with a soft twisted abdomen allowing it to coil up within its adopted shell. Hermit crabs have pincers, the right one much larger than the left, used to ward off predators such as cuttlefish, squid, octopus and fish. Despite their name, hermit crabs live with others in large colonies. In captivity, hermit crabs have been known to live up to 20 years!

Habitat and shelter

Hermit crabs are found throughout the British Isles, occupying rocky and sandy shorelines. They are also found in deeper water. On shorelines they live in rock pools and pools of seawater in sandy bays. They move around carrying their shells with them; swapping them regularly for larger ones as they grow and moult. Young hermit crabs moult every few months, adults every 18 months.

Feeding

The common hermit crab is an omnivorous scavenger – eating almost anything organic dead or alive. Additionally, it can also eat by filtering organic particles from sea water.

Reproduction

Hermit crabs in rock pools and sandy bays generally reproduce in January and February each year. The female carries up to 300 fertilised eggs attached to her abdomen for approximately 2 months. Once hatched they pass through multiple larval stages before reaching adulthood. Sexual maturity is attained after approximately 1 year.

Additional information

Despite the common name, hermit crabs are more closely related to squat lobsters than crabs.

Fun facts

Resourceful individuals, they can make a home out of any suitable object. These include discarded plastic caps or even a large claw from an edible crab!

References

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Completed by Richard Parkin (2019/20)