

Hermit Crabs

What Is a Hermit Crab?

A hermit crab is a **crustacean** that does not have a shell. There are over 500 different species found in rock pools all over the world. They make their homes in the abandoned shells of dead animals (such as whelks and periwinkles) to protect themselves. When the hermit crab grows in size, it finds a larger shell to move into. Marine hermit crabs live mostly in water while land hermit crabs live mostly on land. However, they both use gills for breathing. Hermit crabs do not like to be alone and can live in groups of around 100.



What Do They Look Like?

Hermit crabs range from 2 to 10cm in length and weigh around 200 to 500g. They have soft, reddish brown bodies that they squeeze into borrowed shells backwards. They have ten legs in total, including two pincers at the front which they use to move and to grab onto smaller objects. Strangely, the right hand pincer (chela) is usually larger than the left.



What Do They Eat?

Hermit crabs are **omnivores** and **scavengers** and their diet is based on small fish, worms and plankton. Hermit crabs have **predators** and are eaten by octopus, sharks and squids. If they survive in the wild, hermit crabs can live for up to 30 years.

Did You Know...?

If a hermit crab sees a shell, it will try it on to see if it fits. If it doesn't, it will wait next to it while other crabs come try it on too. Each crab that unsuccessfully tries the shell on will join the line, lining up in size order. When a crab finally comes along that the new shell fits, the rest of the crabs all swap shells too and everyone gets a new home. Some hermit crabs compete for shells and will kill other hermit crabs in order to steal their homes. This can leave a crab without a shell if the only shell left is too small for it.

Interesting Fact

Hermit crabs can be kept as pets in freshwater but they will not have babies. Hermit crabs in the wild can have a litter size of up to 200 eggs. The female carries the eggs on their abdomen while on land and then releases them in the sea because the saltwater causes the eggs to hatch.

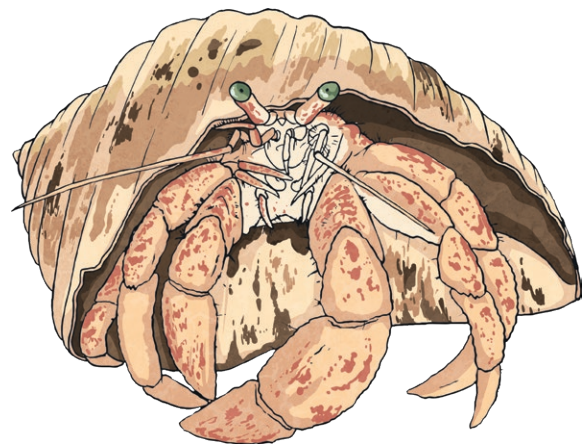
Glossary

crustacean – a type of animal that can live in both freshwater and saltwater

omnivores – animals that eat plants and animals

scavengers – animals that eat dead animals and plants

predators – an animal that hunts other animals



Questions

1. How many species of hermit crab are there? Tick one.

- ☐ over 50
- ☐ over 500
- ☐ over 5
- ☐ over 5000

2. Find and copy **one** word that has a similar meaning to 'empty'.

3. How many legs does a hermit crab have? Tick one.

- ☐ 8
- ☐ 6
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 10

4. Which chela is usually the largest?

5. Which of the following is NOT in a hermit crabs diet? Tick one.

- ☐ shark
- ☐ small fish
- ☐ plankton
- ☐ worms

6. Explain why hermit crabs that are kept as pets in freshwater will not have babies.

7. Draw **four** lines to match the word with its meaning.

scavenger

an animal that can live in
freshwater and saltwater

omnivore

an animal that eats dead
animals and plants

predator

an animal that hunts
other animals

crustacean

an animal that eat plants
and animals

Answers

1. How many species of hermit crab are there? Tick one.

- ☐ over 50
- ☒ **over 500**
- ☐ over 5
- ☐ over 5000

2. Find and copy **one** word that has a similar meaning to 'empty'.

abandoned

3. How many legs does a hermit crab have? Tick one.

- ☐ 8
- ☐ 6
- ☐ 2
- ☒ **10**

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the right

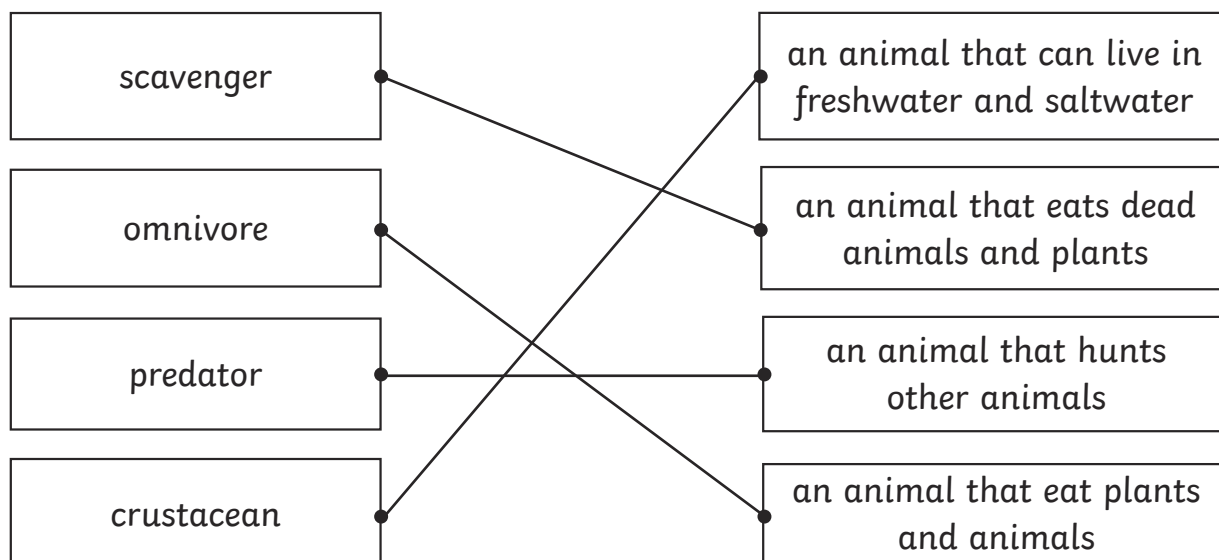
5. Which of the following is NOT in a hermit crabs diet? Tick one.

- ☒ **shark**
- ☐ small fish
- ☐ plankton
- ☐ worms

6. Explain why hermit crabs that are kept as pets in freshwater will not have babies.

Pupils' own responses, such as: Hermit crabs that are kept as pets will not have babies because they need saltwater to cause the eggs to hatch.

7. Draw **four** lines to match the word with its meaning.



Hermit Crabs

A hermit crab is a **crustacean** that does not have a shell. There are over 500 different species found in rock pools all over the world including the Strawberry Hermit Crab and the Caribbean Crab. They make their homes in abandoned shells of dead animals (such as whelks and periwinkles) to protect themselves. When the hermit crab grows in size, it finds a larger shell to move into. Marine hermit crabs live mostly in water while land hermit crabs live mostly on land. However, they both use gills for breathing.



Appearance

Hermit crabs range from 2 to 10cm in length and weigh around 200 to 500g. They have soft, reddish-brown bodies that they squeeze into borrowed shells backwards. They have ten legs in total including two **chelipeds** at the front which they use to move and to grab onto smaller objects. Strangely, the right hand chela is usually larger than the left.



Diet

As **omnivores**, a hermit crab will scavenge on small fish (dead or alive), worms and plankton. However, hermit crabs have **predators** such as octopus, sharks and squids. If they survive in the wild, hermit crabs can live for up to 30 years.

Hermit Crabs as Pets

Due to their distinct personalities, some people keep hermit crabs as pets in freshwater but they will not have babies. They are relatively easy to keep, although the owner needs to provide larger shells as the crab grows. Hermit crabs are very sociable animals and should be kept in groups of at least 3 or 4 as in the wild they have been known to live in colonies of up to 100 crabs. Hermit crabs can't bite because they have no teeth but watch out if you pick one up – they can pinch!

Did You Know...?

If a hermit crab sees a shell, it will try it on to see if it fits. If it doesn't, it will wait next to it while other crabs come try it on too. Each crab that unsuccessfully tries the shell on will join the line, lining up in size order. When a crab finally comes along that the new shell fits, the rest of the crabs all swap shells too and everyone gets a new home. Some hermit crabs compete for shells and will kill other hermit crabs in order to steal their homes. This can leave a crab without a shell if the only shell left is too small for it.



Interesting Fact

Hermit crabs in the wild can have a litter size of up to 200 eggs. The female carries the eggs on her abdomen while on land and then releases them in the sea because the saltwater causes the eggs to hatch.

Glossary

crustacean – a type of animal that can live in both freshwater and saltwater

cheliped – one of the pincer-like pair of claws

omnivores – animals that eat plants and animals

predators – an animal that hunts other animals

Questions

1. Name **two** types of hermit crab.

- _____
- _____

2. What do hermit crabs use to breathe? Tick one.

- ☐ chelipeds
- ☐ nose
- ☐ gills
- ☐ shell

3. What is the definition of a crustacean? Tick one.

- ☐ an animal that eat plants and animals
- ☐ an animal that hunts other animals
- ☐ a type of animal that can live in both freshwater and saltwater
- ☐ an animal that eats dead animals and plants

4. Find and copy **one** word that means 'will eat anything'.

5. Give one reason why a hermit crab might not live for up to 30 years in the wild.

6. Describe **two** ways in which owners can look after their pet hermit crab.

7. What will a hermit crab kill another crab for? Tick one.

- ☐ food
- ☐ a mating partner
- ☐ their shell
- ☐ their babies

8. Where do female hermit crabs carry their eggs? Tick one.

- ☐ on their abdomen
- ☐ in their mouth
- ☐ on their back
- ☐ on their head

Answers

1. Name **two** types of hermit crab.

Strawberry Hermit Crab, Caribbean Crab

2. What do hermit crabs use to breathe? Tick one.

☐ chelipeds

☐ nose

☒ **gills**

☐ shell

3. What is the definition of a crustacean? Tick one.

☐ an animal that eat plants and animals

☐ an animal that hunts other animals

☒ **a type of animal that can live in both freshwater and saltwater**

☐ an animal that eats dead animals and plants

4. Find and copy a word that means 'will eat anything'.

scavenge

5. Give one reason why a hermit crab might not live for up to 30 years in the wild.

Pupils' own responses, such as: Hermit crabs might not live up to 30 years in the wild because they might be eaten by one of their predators such as a shark or squid.

6. Describe two ways in which owners can look after their pet hermit crab.

Pupils' own responses, such as: Owners can look after their pet hermit crab by providing them with a larger shell to move into when they grow and by having several crabs together because hermit crabs do not like to be alone.

7. What will a hermit crab kill another crab for? Tick one.

☐ food

☐ a mating partner

☒ **their shell**

☐ their babies

8. Where do female hermit crabs carry their eggs? Tick one.

☒ **on their abdomen**

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Hermit Crabs

A hermit crab is a **crustacean** that does not have a shell. There are more than 500 different species found in rock pools all over the world including the Strawberry Hermit Crab and the Caribbean Crab. They make their homes in abandoned shells of dead animals (such as whelks and periwinkles) to protect themselves. When the hermit crab grows in size, it finds a larger shell to move into. Marine hermit crabs live mostly in water while land hermit crabs live mostly on land. However, they both use gills for breathing.

Hermit crabs range from 2 to 10cm in length and weigh around 200 to 500g. They have soft, reddish-brown bodies and a curled tail with a hook that they use to squeeze into borrowed shells backwards. They have ten legs in total including two chelipeds (a pincer-like claw) at the front which they use to move and to grab onto smaller objects. Strangely, the right hand chela is usually larger than the left.



Hermit crabs are **omnivorous** scavengers that feast on small fish (dead or alive), worms and plankton. Hermit crabs have **predators** such as octopus, sharks and squids. If they survive in the wild, hermit crabs can live for up to 30 years.

Hermit crabs can produce a litter of up to 200 eggs. The female carries the eggs on her abdomen while on land and then releases them in the sea because the saltwater causes the eggs to hatch.

Hermit crabs are active and curious animals with distinct personalities which make them an unusual but popular pet. They are relatively easy to look after although the owner needs to provide larger shells as the crab grows. They also need to have a suitable habitat and living conditions otherwise their life expectancy drops rapidly. Despite their name, hermit crabs are actually very sociable animals and should be kept in groups of at least 3 or 4: in the wild, they have been known to live in colonies of up to 100 crabs. Hermit crabs can't bite because they have no teeth but watch out if you pick one up – they can pinch!

Did You Know...?

Plastic pollution is a problem for hermit crabs as they often mistake a plastic bottle cap or container for a new home. A recent study found that around 570,000 hermit crabs die every year from getting caught in plastic debris on just two tropical islands in the South Pacific.

Did You Know...?

If a hermit crab spots a desirable, empty shell, it will try it on to see if it fits. If it doesn't fit, the crab will wait next to it while other crabs come try it on too. Each crab that unsuccessfully tries the shell on will form a queue, lining up in size order. When a crab finally comes along that the new shell fits, the rest of the crabs all swap shells, using a hook on their tail, and everyone gets a new home. Some hermit crabs compete for shells and will kill other hermit crabs in order to steal their homes. This can leave a crab without a shell if the only shell left is too small for it.

Sometimes, hermit crabs spot a desirable shell that is already taken. When this is the case, the crab will tap on the outside of the shell. Scientists have carried out studies in order to understand this behaviour better. They have found that if the crab inside the shell shakes violently, it will ward off the competitor. However, if the crab inside only shakes gently, the competitor is likely to flip the shell over and try to remove the crab from its home.

**Glossary**

crustacean – a type of animal that can live in both freshwater and saltwater

cheliped – one of the pincer-like pair of claws

omnivores – animals that eat plants and animals

predators – an animal that hunts other animals

Questions

1. Complete this sentence: A crustacean can live... Tick one.

- ☐ in freshwater only
- ☐ in saltwater and freshwater
- ☐ in saltwater only
- ☐ in tap water

2. What do marine hermit crabs and land crabs have in common?

3. What do hermit crabs use to help them squeeze into a new shell? Tick one.

- ☐ their chelipeds
- ☐ their teeth
- ☐ a hook on their tail
- ☐ their abdomen

4. Explain what is meant by the phrase 'omnivorous scavengers'.

5. Name one predator of a hermit crab.

6. Find and copy **one** word that means 'quickly'.

7. Explain why some people might think that keeping a hermit crab as a pet is cruel.

8. Why do you think a hermit crab will not attack a shell if the crab inside shakes violently but will attack if the crab inside shakes gently?

Answers

1. Complete this sentence: A crustacean can live... Tick one.

- ☐ in freshwater only
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- ☐ in saltwater only
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2. What do marine hermit crabs and land crabs have in common?

They both use their gills for breathing.

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- ☐ their chelipeds
- ☐ their teeth
- ☒ **a hook on their tail**
- ☐ their abdomen

4. Explain what is meant by the phrase 'omnivorous scavengers'.

Pupils' own responses, such as: The phrase 'omnivorous scavengers' means that hermit crabs eat both plants and animals whether they are dead or alive.

5. Name one predator of a hermit crab.

Accept any of the following: shark, squid or octopus

6. Find and copy **one** word that means 'quickly'.

rapidly

7. Explain why some people might think that keeping a hermit crab as a pet is cruel.

Pupils' own responses, such as: Some people might think it is cruel to keep a hermit crab as a pet because they are very sociable animals that live in colonies of up to 100 crabs in the wild. Therefore, even if they have a few other hermit crabs, they could still get lonely. Some people might think it is cruel because they have been taken out of their natural habitat and this can shorten their lifespan.

8. Why do you think a hermit crab will not attack a shell if the crab inside shakes violently but will attack if the crab inside shakes gently?

Pupils' own responses, such as: I think that a hermit crab will not attack a shell when the crab inside shakes violently because they will presume that the crab inside is larger and stronger and that they won't win the fight. If the crab inside shakes gently, the other crab will presume that the one inside is smaller and weaker and easier to defeat.