



## Hermit Crabs

### What are they?

Hermit crabs are crustaceans. Like other crustaceans—blue crabs, shrimp, and lobsters—they have a tough outer shell. However, their abdomens aren't protected by this hard covering. That is why they "borrow" empty shells to live in.

Their bodies are segmented, or divided up into sections, and they have jointed legs.

### What do they look like?

Long-clawed hermit crabs have grey or greenish-white bodies. Their claws are grey with a light brown stripe. However, you very rarely see them outside of their borrowed shells.



Photo Source: Cal Images

Hermit crabs' abdomens are curved in exactly the same way as their host shells. This makes it easier for them to fit into their protective homes.

These crabs live all of their lives in borrowed shells—except when they are very young larvae.

### Where can you find them?

Hermit crabs live on Bay beaches, either on the sand or in the muddy bottoms just off the beaches. They like to hide in underwater beds of Bay grasses.

### How do they behave?

Several kinds of hermit crabs live in the Chesapeake Bay region. The most common one is called the long-clawed hermit crab. They grow to be about  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch long and about  $\frac{3}{8}$  inch wide. They prefer to live in the discarded shells of oyster drills, periwinkles, and mudsnails.

As hermit crabs grow, they need to find new shells in which to live. Usually, they try to find an empty shell. But, if one isn't available, they will grab the creature living in the shell and drag it out.

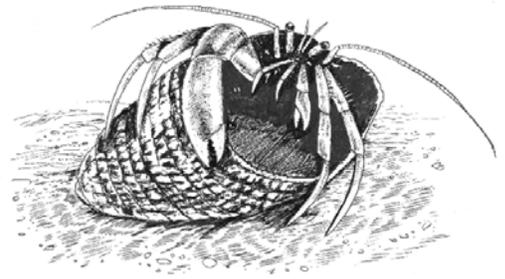
When they are threatened, hermit crabs disappear into their shells, using their large pincer claw to guard the entrance to their "homes."

### What do they eat?

Hermit crabs search for food at night. They eat both plants and animals, often feeding on dead animals, organic matter, and algae. Sometimes they even eat each other.

### What eats them?

Birds and other crabs, are the main predators that feed on hermit crabs.



### Creature Feature

Hermits are people who live by themselves. Although these crabs are called "hermits," they really don't live alone. In fact, hermit crabs often gather in large numbers. This is especially true when they need to shed their old shells. Sometimes a group of crabs will find a new shell they all want to use as their new homes. They line up according to size. As one crab moves to a larger shell, the next one in line gets a chance to move in to the shell that was discarded. This process continues down the line until each crab has a new shell.