

Hermit Crab

“Hermits have been playing the shell game since the age of the dinosaurs.”

Scientific name: *Pagurus ochotensis*

Other Names: Alaskan hermit

Phylum: The hermit crab belongs to the phylum Arthropoda Sub-phylum: Crustacea Order: Decapoda Infraorder: Anomura Family: Paguridae



Size: Hermit crabs vary with species. The Alaskan hermit is large, with a carapace length up to 46 mm (1.8 in).

Description: Hermit crabs are invertebrates, animals without a backbone. They have an exoskeleton, an outer shell that provides support for their body but does not provide much protection from predators. Hermit Crabs' soft abdomens are narrow and curled to fit into a shell; they move to progressively larger shells as they grow. Their front two legs have large, grasping claws (called pincers or chelipeds) and the rear pair of legs are very small. The Alaskan Hermit is only one of many hermit crabs living in Northwest waters.

Hermit Crabs are in a perpetual search for the perfect shell. The competition for this important resource is not the free-for-all that it sometimes appears to be. Hermits have developed specific signals to mediate shell exchanges and thus minimize fights and possible injury.

Habitat: Hermit crabs live in intertidal pools and in shallow subtidal regions.

Diet: Hermit crabs are omnivores (eating plants and animals) and scavengers (eating dead animals that they find). They eat worms, plankton, and organic debris.

Range: The Alaskan hermit is found from Alaska to California and also in Japan.

Relatives: Alaskan King Crabs

Conservation Status: Hermit crab survival is dependant upon an abundant supply of shells, especially snail shells, for homes. Where there are enough shells, hermit crabs are not endangered.

Fun Facts:

- II Shells are usually acquired through exchanges or recycled as hand-me-downs. Most species show a distinct preference for particular kinds of shells.
- II Pagurids are “right handed” in that their right claw is larger and often a much different shape than their left one.
- II One species lives in empty tube worms. Unlike snail shells, sections of worm tube often have two usable openings and housing shortages sometimes produce crustacean equivalents of the “pushme-pullyou” variety.