



Terrestrial Hermit Crabs *Coenobita sp.*

- Hermit crabs are of a very large group of crustaceans (at least 1100 species) found in tropical marine and/or terrestrial environments of the Indo Pacific region, as well as 1-2 species found elsewhere.
- Most commonly kept hermit crabs belong to the genus of terrestrial crabs, *Coenobita sp.*
- Hermit crabs have a soft, vulnerable spiral shaped abdomen that is usually concealed or protected by a shell. They have 5 pairs of legs overall (10), including a pair modified into pincers. Hermit crabs can range in physical color from grayish, reddish, to reddish brown.
- Hermit crabs are often seen as inexpensive, disposable/throwaway pets, but some species can reach up to 20-30 years or more lifespan.

Size

Hermit crabs can vary greatly in size, and can be anywhere from only several millimeters, up to around 15 inches in length in some of the largest species. Most are within ½ to 3 ½ inches in size.

Housing

Hermit crabs should be housed in a secure, sturdy, adequately ventilated terrarium, aquarium, or other enclosure. Hermit crabs are gregarious (meaning they are often found in groups), and multiple crabs can be housed together provided an adequately sized enclosure is accordingly provided. A 10-15 gallon or similar sized enclosure often is suitable. Crabs that are not provided adequate space or larger shells that can be used (which can be purchased commercially) will fight and possibly kill one another for resources. A substrate that enables hermit crabs to dig and burrow, as well as maintain adequate humidity should also be provided. Sand substrates as well as coconut fibers and mixtures thereof can be used. A shallow water dish or both fresh water and salt water mixture should also be provided for hermit crabs, but should not contain chlorine or other chemicals that may cause ill effect on hermit crabs. Additional furnishings that should be provided in a hermit crab enclosure for added security and stimuli include larger and sufficient number of shells for each crab to grow into, as well as driftwood, artificial foliage, and hides in the form of log or slab hides, clay flower pots, or other commercially designed hides and cage decor.

Adequate humidity is perhaps one of the most important factors for maintaining hermit crabs, which should be around 70%. Providing a sponge inside their water dishes can often aid in raising humidity levels as well. A temperature gradient should also be provided in the enclosure, with around 70-75 degrees F ambient/cool side temperature and 80-85 degrees F warm side using appropriate incandescent lighting/heating mechanisms.

Feeding/Diet

In the wild, hermit crabs are omnivores, feeding on algae, small plankton, smaller invertebrates, as well as being scavengers.

In captivity, a varied, rotating diet for hermit crabs is recommend. Many commercially available hermit crab foods and diets are available, with some being better and more suitable than others. It is always a good idea to read and understand any labels and ingredients on any such diets that may be used. Hermit crabs will also readily eat many types of fruits and vegetables, dried bread/cracker material, cereals, nuts, and some other commercially available fish foods.

Further information on what constitutes a suitable vs. unsuitable hermit crab diet can be provided upon request.

Handling

Hermit crabs can be handled carefully, although they may pinch (which is not painful or dangerous). They can be picked up and handled by their shell or be allowed to walk on one's hands. Care should be taken to not drop them, however, since this can fracture their shell and/or cause internal injury to them.

Also be sure to practice basic cleanliness and hygiene associated with proper husbandry after touching or handling any animals or animal enclosures to prevent the possibility of contracting salmonellosis or any other zoonotic pathogens