



Land Hermit Crabs (*Coenobita clypeatus*)

Food: Hermit crabs in their native environment live inland away from any salt water. Their diet consists of leaf litter, fruits, and vegetation. They also have a preference for decaying wood (with the exception of conifers such as pine and cedar). In captivity it is recommended that they be fed a good quality commercial food. Treats such as coconut, romaine lettuce, apple, white bread, plain popcorn (or with sea salt), etc.... can be fed on alternate days. Oyster shell, eggshell, or cuttlebone is recommended for calcium. Uneaten food should be removed daily to avoid spoilage.

Water: In humid climates, it is important to bathe your hermit crab twice weekly. In dry climates or in low humidity (such as houses heated in the winter by hot forced air) bathing every other day is important. Daily misting your crab outside his enclosure, although not necessary, is desirable. Fresh water should always be available. Use a non-metallic shallow dish with a sponge placed in the centre to prevent drowning. The water provided must be the same quality that is used for tropical fish. Hard water with iron is not desirable.

Housing: An aquarium with 2-3 inches of gravel or sand is ideal, with a sand pile in the corner of around 6 inches deep, this pile should be kept damp at all times in case they need to moult. Optimum temperature is 70-75 degrees Fahrenheit. In cooler areas it may be necessary to purchase a heater to provide these temperatures. Do **NOT** use heat lamps, full-spectrum lamps, or corn-cob bedding as these act as desiccants and dehydrate the crabs.

General: Hermit crabs are generally non-aggressive and can be handled. Avoid giving the large purple pincher claw any part of you to grab though. Holding your palm out flat is one way to avoid this. If you are unfortunate enough to get pinched, hold the contact point under medium hot water. This will normally make the crab release. The smaller claw is the feeding claw and is used to pass both food and water to the crabs mouth. The name "hermit" is untrue as these animals do very well in groups. They communicate with each other by making various sounds. Disputes between individuals are usually over shells. They are good climbers and are often quick to explore new objects placed in their enclosure. Some have lived as long as 15 years in captivity.

Land hermit crabs cannot reproduce in captivity. Reproduction is the only time they require the sea. Like other crustaceans, hermit crabs grow by shedding their exoskeleton. During this time they need to be kept extra moist and in a medium they can burrow into, they burrow down for 3-4 weeks, during this time they should not be disturbed and must be kept damp, It may be necessary to isolate them from any other crabs at this time as they are most vulnerable. As crabs grow they require larger shells to live in. Provide various spare shells as they need one that feels just right. When they have moulted they will go back to the old shell but will come out and look for a new one. New shells should always be available. **Never** remove a crab from its shell as it will sometimes allow itself to be torn apart rather than leave the safety of its shell.