



Flat-Clawed Hermit Crab

(*Pagurus pollicaris*)

Introduction

Our coastal hermit crabs are usually confused with the land crab that is sold in gift and pet shops. Ours are marine creatures that steal or exchange shells to wear as an exoskeleton to protect its' abdomen. They shell is only a rental because it has to find another bigger one as it grows. Occasionally a hermit will take on a hitchhiker, such as sponge as this gives the crab a bit of camouflage. This species is only one of many that inhabit our estuaries.

What do they look like?

Hermit crabs have 5 pairs of legs, the first pair is modified into claws and the last two pairs helps them hold onto the borrowed shell as it is stronger than their own.

How big are they?

They can reach an adult size of 1¼ inches (3cm) long and 1 inch(2.5cm) wide.

Where do they live?

Hermit crabs live in estuaries and shallow protected areas though some migrate on a daily schedule between deep and shallow water.

Who eats them?

Despite the protection of their borrowed shells, they are preyed upon by larger hermit

crabs, box crabs, octopus, as well as fish that have jaws for crushing the shell. They are also in many shorebird diets.

What do they eat?

They are omnivorous and will eat plant and animal detritus.

How do they mate?

Male and female crabs find each other by pheromones they exude. The male fertilizes the females eggs and she allows them to develop until they are ready to be released into the water as zoea larvae.

What are the young like?

The minute young are hatched as larvae into the plankton where they are swept into tide to begin a drifting stage. During this stage they look more like tiny shrimp than hermit crabs. The larvae feed and grow as they drift along in ocean currents. When they have reached the right stage of development, they drop to the seafloor and transform into their bottom-dwelling form and must immediately find a small snail shell for protection.

People Interactions

Although they can be eaten by man. it is not common locally. The land (caribbean) hermit crab is sold as pets as they breath air.

EstuaryLive

www.EstuaryLive.org

North Carolina National Estuarine Research Reserve

www.ncnerr.org or tel. 252.728.2170

Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Program

<http://www.apnep.org/> or tel. 252.946.6481

Carolina Estuarine Reserve Foundation

www.cerf.us

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