

# LEVEL 1

## BERMUDA PROTECTED SPECIES

# LAND HERMIT CRAB

*Coenobita clypeatus*

May 2012

## Description

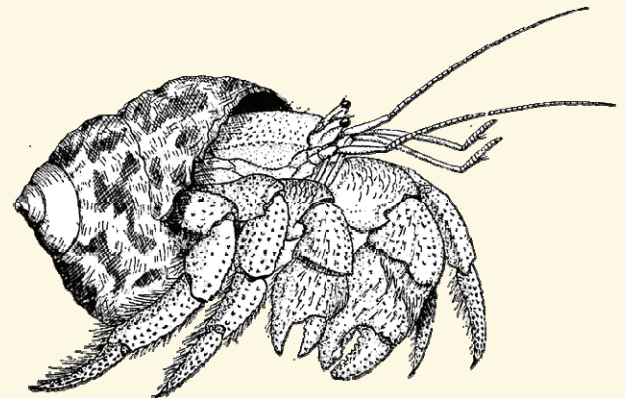
Land Hermit Crabs are the biggest hermit crabs in Bermuda, growing up to 10 cm (4 inches) long, and they are the only hermit crabs found on land. These crabs are easy to identify when found. They have large claws and hairy legs that are red and purple and come out of the front of their shell. All hermit crabs live in a shell that they carry on their back. Hermit crabs do not produce their own shell, they use an old shell made by another animal, such as a marine snail. The back half of a hermit crabs body is soft so they need their shell for protection, and have adapted a hook-shaped tail and strong legs to hang on to the inside of their shell. The hermit crab can retreat completely into the shell when threatened. When the hermit crab grows too big for its shell, it will search for a bigger one.



LAND HERMIT CRAB IN A TOPSHELL

## Habitat and Ecology

The Land Hermit Crab is native to Bermuda; it is also found in Florida and the Caribbean. Its habitats include mangrove forests, salt marshes and coastal forest. They are often found hiding under coastal vegetation, under rock ledges or in holes in trees where herons and other predators cannot find them. Land Hermit Crabs eat all kinds of plants, and can often be found climbing high up in coastal trees. They are also part of nature's recycling service, as they scavenge rotting animals and dead fish.



Land Hermit Crabs breath through gills like marine crabs, and they must keep their gills wet. They do this by keeping a water supply inside their shell. Land Hermit Crabs need both salt water and fresh water to survive.

Historically the main source of shells for the Land Hermit Crab was the West Indian Topshell. Unfortunately these large snails were a favorite food of the early settlers and were extirpated from Bermuda. With large shells no longer available, the number of crabs that could survive was seriously reduced.



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Not only is the Land Hermit Crab dependant on the sea as a source of shells for new homes, but also for reproduction. The female goes down to the sea once a year just before the full moon to release her fertilised eggs.

## Why is the Land Hermit Crab protected?

Bermuda is probably the northern-most latitude of occurrence of this species. The Land Hermit Crab is now rare in Bermuda. This is partly due to a historic lack of suitable shells. Land Hermit Crab numbers have also been reduced by habitat loss such as mangrove habitats and coastal areas which have been cleared and developed, or damaged by hurricanes. The crabs also fall prey to herons and people who use them for bait. Today this species is rarely seen and as such is listed as Vulnerable due to its significant decline and the importance of this isolated, high-latitude population.

## What conservation actions are underway?

The Land Hermit Crab was added to the Protected Species Order in 2012. Hermit crab habitats are protected within several nature reserves, including Hungry Bay and the Castle Harbour Islands. Periodic crab population assessments are undertaken in the reserves. Hermit crabs are also monitored by private landowners where populations are known.

Empty Topshells are being placed in protected areas to help alleviate the shortage of shells for crabs. The West Indian Topshell was reintroduced to Bermuda in 1982 and was given legal protection from harvesting. With Topshells becoming common on the South Shore, it is hoped that the population of these threatened crabs may begin to increase.

## Legal implications

Any person who *damages, destroys, removes, takes, exports, purchases, transports or has in his or her possession* a Level 1 protected species, without a permit or license, commits an offense under the Protected Species Act 2003, punishable by a \$25,000 fine or two years imprisonment. Contact the Department of Conservation Services to inquire about obtaining a permit or a license to research or propagate a protected species.

## For further information

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T (441) 293 2727. (W) [www.conservation.bm](http://www.conservation.bm)

Disclaimer: The information contained in this publication is based on the knowledge and understanding at the time of writing.

