

Creature of the week



Hermit Crab

Pagurus novaezelandiae

150 – 250 mm



Three hermit crabs, in different shells, having a korero in a coralline fringed pool at Long Bay. The top and bottom crabs are housed in catseye shell while the right hand critter has a Cominella shell.

Photo David Gray@MERC

Hermit Crab *Pagurus novaezelandiae*
150 – 250 mm

Description:

This ‘squatter’ crab has blue, hairy walking legs and knobbly pincers- one larger than the other. The abdomen is soft, flexible and twisted, with a pair of small, strong limbs at the tail end used for gripping the tail end into the shell housing. The feelers (antennae) are long and flick about sensing the incoming current for food or danger.

The large claw is used to tear the food to bits, while the smaller claw delicately hands the fragments to the mouth.

It can withdraw its body into the protection of the shell very quickly and uses the large claw as a solid trapdoor to the shell opening.

. As the crab grows, he feels the pinch, and must find a larger shell that is a snug fit – not too sloppy, nor too tight. Swopping shells is a dangerous time as his soft naked body is exposed to predators!

Habitat:

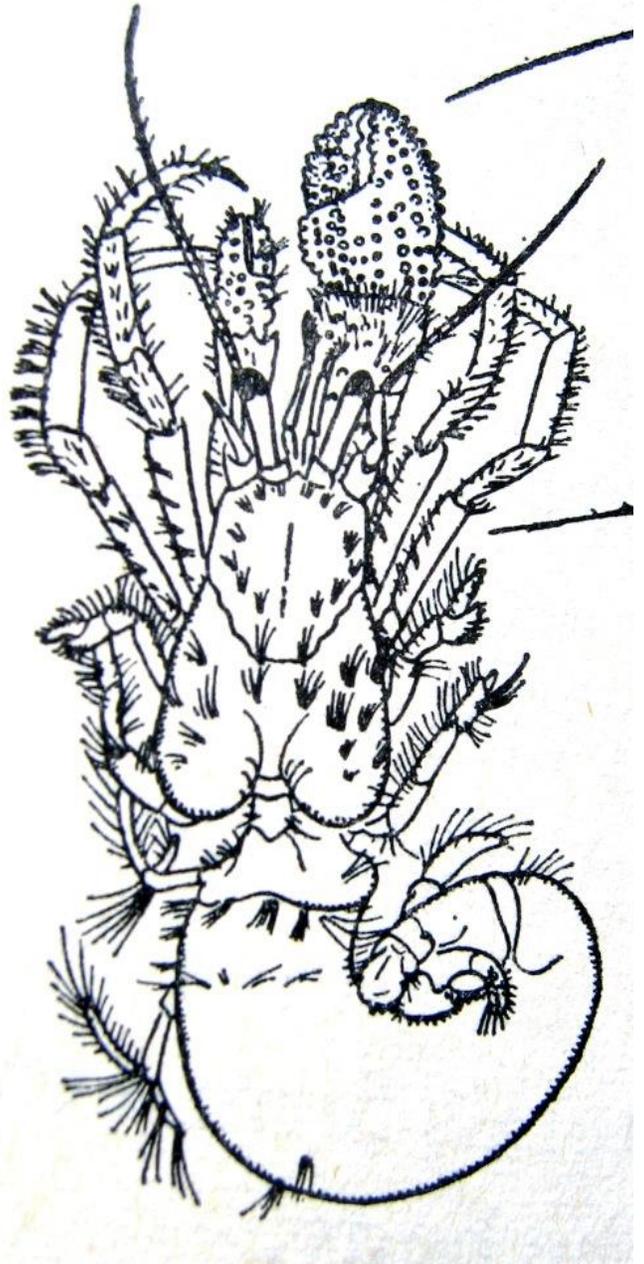
Tidal pools in the rocky shore at various tidal levels.

Diet:

A scavenger and carnivore, but has a varied diet and even algae are eaten when protein food is scarce. It is a good idea to take a little morsel of food and drop it into a pool and watch the crabs hone in and fight for it.! Children love to see this action.

Reproduction :

The female hermit crab has two or three slender leggy things (pleopods) which carry the fertilized egg clusters guarded within the shell.



References:

Diagram and most of the info is from Morton and Miller,
"The New Zealand Sea Shore", Fig. 66, page 199.