



Australian Land Hermit Crab Care Sheet

Caring for Australian Land Hermit Crabs

Australian Land Hermit Crabs are fascinating animals and make suitable pets for those willing to meet their specific care needs. They are social creatures that thrive in groups, making them interesting to observe. However, due to their delicate nature and specific environmental requirements, they may not be ideal pets for everyone.

Sadly, most hermit crabs that find themselves in the pet trade do not thrive or even survive as they would in the wild. Additionally, many of the products and enclosures marketed for hermit crabs and sold at pet shops are not appropriate for these animals.

This is a very basic introduction to Australian land hermit crab care to help you decide whether a hermit crab is the right pet for you. The information provided here is not exhaustive and the additional references (see below) should be consulted before purchasing hermit crabs.

Natural History of Australian Land Hermit Crab

Australian land hermit crabs (*Coenobita variabilis*) are native to the coastal regions of Northern Western Australia, the Northern Territory and Northern Queensland. These crabs are terrestrial, spending most of their lives on land but travel to the ocean to bathe and reproduce. Nocturnal by nature, they are most active at night, inhabiting sandy beaches, rocky shorelines, and forested areas.

Hermit crabs' bodies are soft and at risk of trauma and drying out if not protected. Hermit crabs have adapted to utilise the shells of deceased gastropods (snails) to shelter their soft bodies. The shells therefore do not grow as the animals grow, so as they get bigger, they need new, larger shells. Land hermit crabs breathe through specialised gills which require high humidity levels for respiration.





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Enclosure

A suitable enclosure for Australian Land Hermit Crabs is a glass or plastic tank with a secure lid to maintain humidity and prevent escape. The tank should be large enough to provide space for climbing, exploring, and burrowing. A minimum size of 38L per crab is recommended. Ventilation needs to be minimised to prevent the humidity dropping (see below). Climbing opportunities (such as driftwood) should be provided.



Substrate

The substrate should be a mixture of children's play sand and coir peat at a ratio of 8:1 to allow for burrowing, which is essential for moulting. The substrate depth should be at least 15cm, but deeper is better. The substrate should be moist but not waterlogged, keeping humidity levels between 70-85%. A dish containing sphagnum moss that is kept moist can be provided to increase humidity. The humidity can be measured with a device called a hygrometer (which can be purchased from hardware stores). See the additional references for more information regarding humidity.

Temperature

Australian land hermit crabs naturally live in tropical warm environments. This means that in most circumstances their enclosure will need to be actively warmed. A reptile heat mat or heat cord should be attached to the outside of the back wall above the level of the substrate. It should be used in conjunction with a thermostat to provide a temperature gradient of 26-32 degrees Celsius. Using a thermostat helps ensure that the tank doesn't get too hot or too cold.

Handling

Hermit crabs are not an animal that appreciate interactions with humans. Handling hermit crabs should be avoided wherever possible. Handling causes stress and removing them from their high humidity enclosure makes it hard for them to breathe. If you do need to handle them, pick them up by the shell. Always wash your hands before and after handling to prevent the transfer of oils and chemicals.



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Spare Shell Selection

Providing a variety of spare shells is crucial for the well-being of your hermit crabs. As they grow, they need to switch to larger shells. Ensure you have multiple shells of different sizes and types available at all times. Replacement shells can be purchased online. The additional references provide information on how to select and prepare appropriate spare shells for your hermit crabs. DO NOT provide painted shells, as the paint can be toxic and harmful to the crabs. If you purchase a hermit crab in a painted shell, do not attempt to remove it from the shell; simply provide alternative shell options and it will move when it is ready.

Common Problems

Common problems that can occur with land hermit crabs include:

- Moulting Issues
- Dehydration
- Shell Fights
- Inadequate shell options
- Stress

By providing the proper care and environment, Australian Land Hermit Crabs can thrive and provide years of enjoyment as unique and interesting pets.



Additional References

- <https://www.happyhermie.com.au/>
- <https://hermitcrabassociation.com/phpBB/index.php>
- <https://lhcos.org/>