

AEC STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

SOP No:	15
SOP	Hermit Crabs
Scientific Name:	<i>Coenobita variabilis</i>
Category:	2 or 3
Approval Level:	Category 2: School Principal may delegate Category 3: School Principal may NOT delegate
Authority:	Government Schools – Department for Education and Childhood Development Animal Ethics Committee Independent and Catholic Schools – Non-Government Schools Animal Ethics Committee (NGSAEC)
Authority Approval Date:	1 August 2010
Last update:	22 January 2019
Disclaimer:	<i>This document may be updated at any time. You should check the web site regularly to ensure that you are meeting the most recent recommendations. If you note any concerns with the information provided (inadequate, incorrect) please contact the relevant AEC.</i>
Licensing Requirement:	Not applicable
Compliance Requirement:	The keeping of this species requires approval from the School Principal. It is recommended that this Standard Operating Procedure be followed as a minimum in the provision of appropriate care and housing for this species.

General Information: Hermit crabs are omnivorous crustaceans. They are best sourced through pet shops and the only species that should be sold are the Australian Land Hermit Crab. Most are marine creatures and require salt-water habitats however land hermit crabs are from further inland. Australia has two species of Land Hermit Crab. They are found in mangroves, sandy and rocky beaches. Remember all pet crabs have been collected and removed from their wild habitat. They have a large left pincher claw for defence, balance and climbing. The right smaller claw is for moving food and water to their mouth.

Physical Attributes:

- **Size (adult):** Crabs continue to grow and need larger shells to habit. They average 1-6cm.
- **Weight (adult):** Varies with age and size.
- **Life span:** Captivity up to 15 years. In nature up to 30 years
- **Sexual maturity:** Adults.
- **Gestation period:** Lay eggs shortly after fertilisation but can hold the sperm for several months.
- **Number of offspring:** Larvae hatch in the shallows and develop into small crabs before looking for a shell to inhabit and move onto land.

Behaviour:

- **Normal:** They are nocturnal and therefore more active during the night.
- **Socialisation:** Hermit crabs can live in colonies but only keep a few in the tank.
- **Activity levels (moult etc):** They shed their exoskeleton and grow a new one. This moulting occurs every 2 –18 months depending on their age, size and habitat. During this time they are very vulnerable and will bury themselves in the sand. It takes up to 10 days for the new exoskeleton to harden. They often consume the old skeleton. As they grow they need to replace their host shell. They require a shell that fits their whole body and allows for room to grow. This also assists with moisture management. They will not change if no suitable shell is available and may fight if there are not enough shells.

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Environment:

- **Space:** You will need an aquarium 45cm x 30cm x 30cm. There should be a gravel base. Dish of water they can crawl into and out of easily. A number of hollow shells larger than the one they are in.
- **Movement:** Crabs can move quickly. They extend their legs outside the host shell and scuttle along.
- **Water:** Keep water available at all times. Use tap water that has been allowed to stand for ½ day.
- **Temperature:** Tanks should not be exposed to direct sunlight. Where heat waves occur and cooling is difficult to maintain spray the inside of the tank with water to keep up the humidity. Hermit crabs die if the temperature is too cold or too hot. Maintain a temperature between 20-30°C.
- **Filtration:** Not necessary
- **Lighting:** A globe should be provided. The globe should be on if the day temperature is below 25°C or the night temperature is below 20°C. The globe must not be used if the day temperature exceeds 30°C.
- **Covering:** Where the hermit crabs are at risk from younger children and to assist with heating, cooling and humidity the tank should be covered.
- **Shelter:** The aquarium should provide an area for refuge from lights, action and other crabs. This can be created with plants and rocky overhangs.
- **Cleaning:** Regular removal of food waste is required. To clean the whole tank, remove and place the crabs in a secure container. Rinse the tank carefully and fill again with gravel and items. Do not use chemicals. Rinse gravel through thoroughly.

Feeding:

- **Diet:** In the wild they eat vegetable matter and carrion. Use hermit crab pellets, meat yabby pellets, oats, mouse and guinea pig pellets can be used.
- **Daily requirements:** Food should be placed in an open flat bowl. Feeding should occur 3 times a week.
- **Supplementary feeding:** N/A
- **Equipment:** Uneaten food should be removed. Water should be topped up daily.

Breeding:

- **Mating:** The male deposits sperm into the female's gonopores on the first segment of the females back pair of walking legs.
- **Pregnancy:** Land Hermit Crabs cannot breed in captivity, as eggs need to hatch in the sea.
- **Fate planning:** As an introduced species to SA they must NEVER be released into the environment or waterways.

Handling:

- **Human:** Hermit crabs should be handled minimally. Wash hands (no soap) thoroughly before handling the crab. Pick them up by the back of the shell and place them on an open flat palm. NEVER try to remove a crab from its shell home.
- **Equipment:** Where crab movement is being observed by children out of the tank they must be placed on clean tray or plastic sheet not on the floor or carpet.
- **Transporting:** Hermit crabs should be transported in their tank or a container that has been lightly sprayed with water to maintain humidity. Transport quickly and do not leave unattended or allow the hermit crab to heat.

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- **Children:** Should not handle hermit crabs. Observation only. Children should not knock on the tanks.

Hygiene: Thoroughly wash hands with soap and running water for at least 10-15 seconds after working or handling any animals. Dry hands with clean paper, cloth towel or air dryer. Turn off the tap with the paper towel if possible.

Signs of illness:

- **Indicators:** loss of appetite, failure to thrive.

Treatments: Assistance from a veterinarian should be sought for confirmation of conditions and treatment options. Many aquarium treatments are not suitable for hermit crabs and may cause further distress or death.

Euthanasia: When an illness or injury is such that recovery is unlikely then the animal must be euthanased by a veterinarian. Any death must be reported to the Animal Ethics Committee using the appropriate form (see section relating to ADVERSE EVENTS). Forms are available on the relevant websites – see contact details below.

Disposal/fate planning: When no longer required hermit crabs must be re homed. They must NEVER be released into the environment or waterways. Bodies must be disposed of correctly in accordance with local council regulations.

Holiday and weekend care: As they require specific conditions they would not cope well with being rostered to family carers. They need to be checked daily and fed regularly over weekends and holiday periods or taken home by staff.

Records must be kept of 'off site' care. Feeding equipment and supplies must be provided to carers, with contact details for emergencies.

Approved activities: Observation

Resources:

Websites: www.hermit-crabs.com