# GEORGIA AQUARIUM ANIMAL FACT SHEET

## **Hermit Crab**

Various genera

## Range/Habitat

- Hermit crabs are a group of decapod crustaceans made up of many different genera. This
  type of crab occurs throughout the world oceans.
- It inhabits tide pools, mud flats, and oyster beds as well as other intertidal and subtidal zones. Some are found in deeper water further offshore.

## **Physical Characteristics**

- The hermit crab is characterized by a long, soft asymmetrical abdomen that it coils into an empty snail shell for protection.
- The crab exhibits a variety of characteristics that can be used to distinguish among the various species (e.g., relative claw size, coloration and striped appendages, snail shell type, superficial hair).

## Diet/Feeding

- The hermit crab generally is a scavenger, feeding on dead animals and plants. Smaller species subsist on detritus and algae.
- Some offshore species have been observed killing and removing snails from their shells in order to occupy the shell themselves.

### **Conservation Status**

No hermit crab species are included in the IUCN Red List

### **Additional Information**

- The hermit crab must move to larger and larger snail shells as it grows. A short supply of suitable shells can limit population size and result in larger crabs evicting smaller ones, if the small crab inhabits a large shell. Unavailability of a larger shell may also limit growth and reproduction of individuals.
- In the hermit crab, the fertilized eggs are attached to the abdominal appendages of the female and the eggs hatch into free-swimming zoea larvae.
- The hermit crab can serve as a host to a variety of commensal invertebrates: flatworms, polychaete worms, snails and anemones.
- Different species of hermit crabs prefer different types of snail shells. Some choose lightweight shells that allow faster, more agile movement. Others prefer larger and heavier shells that provide more protection

#### Sources

Seashore Animals of the Southeast. Ruppert, E. and Fox, R.

Crustacea Guide of the World. Debelius, H.

Peterson Field Guides - Southeastern and Caribbean Seashores. Kaplan, E.