



CRABS



Our vet **Joe Inglis** is scuttling across the sand to take a sideways look at the ultimate recyclers of the seas!

There are around 7,000 species of crabs, belonging to a big group of animals called crustaceans. This means crabs are closely related to lobsters, shrimps and even woodlice, as well as being distant cousins of insects. They live in all of the world's oceans, as well as in fresh water and on land.



RECYCLED SHELLS

Not all crabs have their own hard shells – hermit crabs (which are not true crabs, even though they are closely related) have a soft exoskeleton and use discarded shells from sea snails to protect their bodies. Instead of moulting as they grow, they simply move house to a larger shell.

ARMOUR PLATED

Like all crustaceans, crabs don't have bones inside their bodies. Instead, they have an exoskeleton. The downside of this suit of armour is that it doesn't allow the crab to grow. As they develop into adults, crabs need to regularly shed their exoskeletons and grow new ones. This process is called moulting.



I'm a claw-some recycler!

LEFT FOOT FORWARDS

Most crabs walk sideways – it's just easier with all those legs and a big hard shell – although some species can walk forwards and backwards.

5.5 METRES

The size, from claw to claw, of the world's biggest crab species, the Japanese spider crab. At the other end of the scale, pea crabs are only a few millimetres across and live inside the shells of mussels and oysters.

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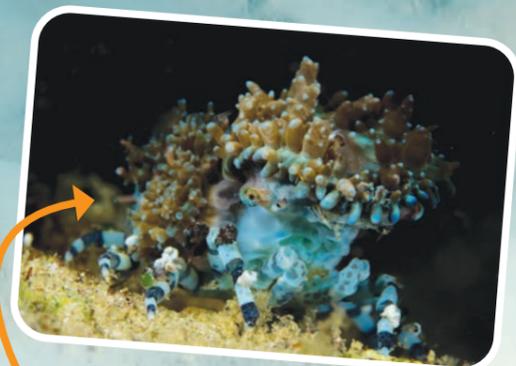
The number of legs crabs have. Only eight are used for walking or swimming, with the front pair adapted as pincers for feeding and fighting.

WASTE NOT, WANT NOT

Crabs are omnivorous, which means they can eat a varied diet of animals and plants and this makes them great natural recyclers. As well as munching through algae, worms and shellfish, crabs are great at clearing up waste food and doing their bit to keep the oceans clean!

COCONUT CRABS

Coconut crabs don't live inside coconut shells. When they are young, they use snail shells like other hermit crabs, and then they grow a tough exoskeleton as they get older. Their name comes from the coconut palm trees they live around. Coconut crabs are the largest land-dwelling crabs, weighing up to 4kg.



WHAT A LOVELY ANEMONE YOU'RE WEARING!

It's not just food and shells that crabs recycle – some species are also great at recycling accessories. Decorator crabs cover their shells with plants and animals to provide camouflage and protection.

