



news release

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LHCOS supports Illinois legislation to ban painted hermit crab shells

Painted shells are inhumane, unnecessary and destroy needed natural resource

WAYNE CITY, ILL., MARCH 1, 2023 — The Land Hermit Crab Owner’s Society supports Illinois House Bill HB3257 sponsored by Illinois House of Representative Robert Rita. Painted shells for hermit crabs are inhumane, unnecessary and destroy a much-needed natural resource. This type of animal abuse should be illegal, not just in Illinois but worldwide.

The process used to force hermit crabs from their natural shells into painted, decorative shells is cruel and inhumane. Painted hermit crab shells exist solely as a marketing gimmick employed by the pet trade to entice children and their parents into purchasing them. There currently are not enough shells left on our beaches for hermit crabs to use as shelter to protect their bodies.

Every year, millions of hermit crabs are taken from their humid, warm beach paradise and piled into plywood boxes, destined for boardwalks, beach resorts and pet stores across the United States. Once captured by the pet trade, hermit crabs are forced out of their natural shells using inhumane processes that injure the crab and destroy its natural shell. A hermit crab cannot survive without its shell — the shell protects its soft and delicate body, contains a careful mix of salt and freshwater to help it survive dry conditions, and regulates its body temperature. At processing centers, the hermit crabs’ shells are broken in a vise, bodies plucked from the shards and they’re thrown into a box containing more “marketable” painted shells. Hermit crabs are often forced into painted shells while the paint is still wet. The paint dries and traps the crab inside the shell, which leads to the crab not being able to change shells as it grows. Many

hermit crabs do not survive this process and if they do, experience severe injuries and limb loss that significantly reduce its chances of surviving in captivity.

Painted shells attract small children and their parents who see the hermit crabs for sale while wandering along boardwalks and shops. Hermit crab shells are painted to match whatever is currently popular and appealing to children — Spongebob, a soccer ball, Batman — and are frequently advertised as “free” with the purchase of a care kit. Care must be taken when marketing living beings to children, which could inadvertently teach them to treat a living creature as if it were a plastic, disposable toy.

Hermit crabs depend upon properly fitting shells for protection from predators, mating success and reproduction. Hermit crabs, whose own bodies provide only thin, soft exoskeletons, must scavenge to find hard-walled shells abandoned by marine gastropods that they can wear for shelter. The shells that hermit crabs seek are made by marine gastropods that secrete calcium carbonate, which forms a crystalline shell into a spiral shape with an opening to accommodate a hermit crab’s growing body. Scientists estimate that more than 30 percent of hermit crabs in the wild are wearing shells that are much too small or improperly fitting due to shell shortages along coastlines and beaches. The present lack of hermit crab housing is so severe that biologists now routinely find land hermit crabs attempting to shelter themselves in trash, glass jars and whatever other ill-fitting forms of refuse they may find along the beach. Human activity due to the pet trade and shell collecting is largely to blame for the current seashell shortage. Eliminating painted shells in the pet trade will reduce the number of seashells removed from beaches and will greatly improve wild hermit crabs’ chances of finding natural, well-fitting shells to use as shelter.

With proper care, hermit crabs can live more than 40 years but because of the pet trade abuse, many only survive a couple of years. The overwhelming misinformation about proper hermit crab care is responsible for the unnecessary death of millions of hermit crabs every year.

About the Land Hermit Crab Owners Society: LHCOS advocates to improve the lives of captive land hermit crabs and protect and preserve wild hermit crabs, their habitat and resources like shells. LHCOS is dedicated to the core values of: Conservation & Community, Advocacy, Research & Rescue and Education. More information about the Land Hermit Crab Owners Society is available at <https://lhcos.org/>.

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