False crabs

Anomura

“False crabs” is a name we have given to a group of species known as anomarans by scientists. It is the sister group to true crabs (brachyurans) and includes familiar species such as hermit crabs, porcelain crabs and squat lobsters.

How to find

Hermit crabs are famous for living in shells of other species (usually molluscs). In UK rock pools hermit crabs are often found in the shells of whelks, periwinkles and top shells, so look closely at these shells if they are on the bottom of rock pools and look for unusual movement. Other false crabs, such as porcelain crabs and squat lobsters, are most likely to be found under rocks. Be careful not to hurt yourself or the wildlife when lifting rocks and make sure you put them back afterwards how you found them.

What’s out there?

There are at least nine species that can be found on UK rocky shores. The broad-clawed porcelain crab and the common hermit crab can be found at most sites. Other species are rarer but some often be found.

The Main Suspects

**Broad-clawed porcelain crab**  
*Porcellana platycheles*  
- Small, hairy and often covered in mud  
- Broad pincers  
- Mid to low shore

**Common hermit crab**  
*Pagurus bernhardus*  
- Right pincer bigger than the left  
- Rows of ‘granules’ on pincers  
- Low to mid shore

**Long-clawed porcelain crab**  
*Pisidia longicornis*  
- Hairless body  
- Long, slender pincers  
- Low shore
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St Piran's hermit crab
Clibanarius erythropus
- Pincers equal in size with black tips
- Black eyes with white spots
- Mid to low shore

Common squat lobster
Galathea squamifera
- Green brown with red tips spines
- Long slender pincers
- Low shore

Spiny squat lobster
Galathea strigosa
- Large, up to 90mm body length
- Colourful with bold markings
- Low shore

The long shots

Prideaux's hermit crab
Pagurus prideaux
- Pale in colour
- No point between the eyes
- Mainly subtidal

Rugose squat lobster
Munida rugosa
- Very long pincers
- Stripes on carapace
- Mainly subtidal

South-claw hermit crab
Diogenes pugilator
- Left claw is larger
- Mainly in netted dog whelk shells
- Low shore & subtidal