



## One Man's Trash

A decapod takes adaptation a bit too far. BY NED AND ANNA DELOACH WITH PAUL HUMANN

→ **CERTAINLY**, Anna and I haven't encountered even a fraction of the amazing animals coral reefs have to offer, but quite often these days we find ourselves venturing off the beaten path to explore what we call alternate habitats. Many of our new hunting grounds are around manmade structures such as piers, jetties and dock pilings that, like reefs, attract marine life with their promise of shelter.

Of course, wherever humans congregate, trash proliferates. Cans, shoes, rope, bottles, tires and ubiquitous plastic things carpet the sand around inshore sites. As unseemly as rubbish is above ground, its insult is exaggerated underwater. The shallow seafloors around the docks and jetties where people

live and work are virtual dumps that, I must admit, take a bit of getting used to. But if you can get past the mess and focus on the hunt, there are rare treasures among the garbage.

With some dive sites literally in the front yards of villages, poking around trash is part of the game in Lembeh Strait, Indonesia. Over the decades, many of the popular dive destination's most celebrated creatures have taken up residence within the clutter. However, on a recent trip we discovered a hermit crab taking adaptation a bit too far.

Hermit crabs have evolved to live inside gastropod shells. A soft abdomen with a scale-covered appendage wraps tightly around the shell's coiled internal apex allowing the entire affair to be held securely and

carted around. Outgrown shells are discarded periodically and exchanged for larger homes.

Apparently, the end of a broken soda pop bottle struck the fancy of a rather innovative hermit. The fit was perfect, but lacking a spiral for traction, the new home was awkwardly unstable. When disturbed by our night-lights, the dazed decapod stumbled away like a drunken sailor. The next evening the same fellow still struggled with its new acquisition. To our relief, on the third night, we found the bottle abandoned and the hermit walking briskly about carrying a tried-and-true triton shell. ■

### **Worth a Look**

WATCH THE HERMIT CRAB LOOKING FOR A NEW HOME IN ANNA DELOACH'S VIDEO ON SCUBA DIVING TV AT [SCUBADIVING.COM](http://SCUBADIVING.COM). CLICK ON PHOTO/VIDEO AND THEN THE DELOACHES' ENCOUNTERS.