

Care guide

Matchstick Grasshopper, *Bundinja* sp



Matchstick Grasshoppers are found throughout Australia within a wide range of habitats ranging from eucalypt woodlands to arid deserts. There are a large number of species present and are also known as Morabine Grasshoppers. This species is found throughout central and north QLD, and north-eastern Northern Territory. As their name suggests, they are slender and about the size of a matchstick. They are quite distinctive compared with other grasshoppers as their hind legs lean outwards away from the body which is very noticeable when viewed from above. They feed on eucalyptus leaves, spending their time within the branches of the trees they are feeding on. They can be very hard to see when aligned with stems similar size and colours to themselves.

These grasshoppers are wingless and will jump if disturbed. Due to their relatively small size, each leap doesn't carry them very far so will attempt to hide from predators within the foliage.

The sexes are quite distinctive; adult males have an elongated sub-genital plate which extends well beyond the end of the abdomen (pictured above), females lack this structure. Males will often reside upon the back of the slightly larger females – even when not mating. Mating involves the connection of abdomens via the genital structures which happens intermittently while pairs are together. Once fertilised, females will lay masses of eggs in the ground surrounded by protective foam. The tip of the female's abdomen is equipped with small digging tools which enable her to drive her abdomen deep into the soil to lay eggs in a suitable position. The duration of egg incubation can vary greatly. Some eggs can enter diapause (suspended development) depending on the environmental conditions, and some will develop slowly in cooler conditions. In moist conditions at around 25°C eggs will take about a month to hatch. Nymphs undergo five moults to reach maturity.

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Food: Fresh gum leaves (best offered as a small branch with the stem in a water container to keep them fresh). It is best to offer a couple species of Eucalyptus as options at first, just to establish that the species you are giving them is suitable. They will also feed on Minibeast Wildlife's Orthopteran Food or Grasshopper Food. (If using a water container to keep leaves fresh, ensure it is covered so that grasshoppers cannot fall in and drown).

Water: Lightly mist spray the enclosure once a day. This will keep the enclosure damp and the humidity high. The grasshoppers will drink from the moisture on the foliage and branches.

Enclosure: The ideal enclosure should favour height over length and needs to be about 30 cm H x 30 cm W x 30 cm L. It should be well ventilated and escape proof. The base of the enclosure may be kept bare/clean or covered in dry leaf litter. A substrate is not important unless breeding is intended. In this case a sand or coco-peat a depth of 5 – 10cm would be ideal. A small container of such substrate can be included for egg deposition instead of covering the whole floor with substrate.

Temperature: This species requires warm conditions (mid 20's). It will cope with temperatures up to 30°C and periodic cooling down to the low teens. Avoid prolonged extremes of both heat and cooler conditions. Cool damp conditions are not recommended.

Life span: About 6-9 months.

Handling: This species can be handled but are a little unpredictable and may jump without warning.

Reproduction: This species can be housed in groups, so once mature mating will occur between pairs. Females will poke their abdomens down into the substrate and deposit eggs into suitable sites. Hatching may take one to several months depending on substrate temperatures (mid 20's are ideal). The hatchling grasshoppers will shed their exoskeletons as they emerge from the ground and will begin to feed on the same food as the adults within 24 hours.

Common issues: Take care not to lose them when changing the leaves – do so in a space that allows you to easily find them again if they leap out of the enclosure.

NOTE: These animals are captive bred, and should not be released into the wild.

For more information contact Minibeast Wildlife at info@minibeastwildlife.com.au