

Care guide

Australian Amblypygid, *Charinus pescotti*



Amblypygids are nocturnal predatory arachnids that share some traits with spiders and scorpions but belong to their own separate order; the Amblypygi. Their resemblance to both spiders and scorpions has resulted in them being also referred to as Whip Spiders and Tailless Whip Scorpions. Australia has several species of Amblypygids all found in the northern regions of the country. On a world scale, the Australian species are quite small, measuring around 10mm in adult body length.

Amblypygids have eight legs, however the first pair are highly specialised and known as antenniform legs and used in much the same way as insects use their antennae. These sensory legs are very thin and elongated to several times the length of the body. Apart from having a mere sensory role, these legs can actually assist in 'herding' prey towards the Amblypygid.

Unlike their well known cousins spiders and scorpions, Amblypygids are non-venomous. They are stealthily ambush hunters, moving slowly and deliberately and launching rapidly at their prey at close range. Prey is simply grabbed by their powerful spiny pedipalps and crushed. The chelicerae (mouth-parts) work in much the same way as that of scorpions; prey is slowly crushed and dismembered while the bodily juices are ingested.

Female Amblypygids produce eggs which are secured to the underside of their abdomen in a protective sac for the duration of incubation. Incubation can take three to four months during which time the mother usually does not feed. After hatching young amblypygids remain clinging to their mother's abdomen for at least two weeks, usually longer before dispersing to take on life as miniature predators.

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Food: Small live insects; small crickets are ideal and should be around ¼ the body size of the Amblypygids. Pin-head crickets are excellent food for young Amblypygids. Vinegar flies, juvenile slaters and other small harmless invertebrates may also be used. As your Amblypygid grows the size of prey may be increased.

Water: Mist spray the enclosure to maintain a moist humid environment.

Enclosure: Moist substrate is to a minimum of 30mm is required – coco-peat is ideal. These animals require hides such as bark or small pieces of wood and will generally cling to the wood adjacent to the substrate. Ideally enclosures should be large enough to maintain a basic moisture gradient and several hide options for your Amblypygid to choose from. Containers/enclosures with floor space of 15cm x 15cm and above are suitable as such. These animals are able to climb relatively smooth surfaces so a secure ventilated lid is required.

Temperature/humidity: The safe temperature range for this species is 18 – 26°C, but will tolerate cooler conditions for limited periods. Cooler temperatures will result in a slower growth rate. Ideal humidity is 60-80%. Beware of overheating.

Life span: 3-5 years.

Handling: When disturbed these animals move in short fast bursts and usually move sideways. Due to their small size and movement handling is not recommended due to the risk of escape or injury. To capture or move an Amblypygid, use a container with a flat (square) edge that can be pressed securely against the surface the Amblypygid is sitting upon. Gently guide the Amblypygid into the container. Flat objects such as dry leaves or bark are often good 'tools' to move Amblypygids onto in order to move them from one enclosure to another.

Reproduction: Adult females are generally more robust than males - males have longer pedipalps and a smaller abdomen in relation to cephalothorax size. Pairs may be kept together permanently in large enclosures (30cm x 30cm) and may breed annually in ideal conditions. Juveniles may be kept with adults and if well fed cannibalism does not seem to occur to a significant level.

Common issues: These animals are very good at squeezing into very small crevices and hiding. Choose hides and other enclosure furniture with this in mind. Also avoid unstable heavy objects such as rocks that may injure or kill your Amblypygid when the enclosure is moved.

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