

Care guide

Giant Burrowing Cockroaches

Macropanesthia rhinoceros



Giant Burrowing Cockroaches are the heaviest cockroaches on earth, growing to 80mm in length and weighing up to 30g. They are found in the dry eucalypt scrubland of northern Queensland, where they live underground in burrows they dig themselves using their powerful spiny legs. They usually only venture to the surface at night to forage for food and to find a mate during the breeding season. Their food in the wild consists of dry leaves, particularly those from eucalypt trees.

Unlike most other cockroaches, breeding pairs of this species care for their young in an extraordinary manner. The young (which are born live) remain at the bottom of their parents burrow for several months before venturing to the surface themselves. During this time the parents collect dry leaf litter and take it down to the youngsters, often tearing it up into smaller pieces for the young to easily feed upon.

Like other insects these cockroaches grow by shedding their outer skeleton (exoskeleton). This process is called ecdysis or moulting. Immediately after moulting they appear almost white in colour until their new exoskeleton hardens and develops its true colour.

These cockroaches are slow growing and long lived. Some individuals have been recorded living up to 10 years.

Care guide

Giant Burrowing Cockroach

Macropanesthia rhinoceros

Food: Dry gum leaves (naturally dried brown leaves) – make sure these are always available. A small piece of chopped apple is an excellent supplement, which can be offered weekly or more often if your cockroaches are regularly eating it.

Water: Offer your cockroaches water within a small dish (bottle tops are ideal), filled with a sponge or cotton wool to hold the water.

Enclosure: A medium sized terrarium with a floor size of approximately 25cm x 15cm is suitable, more space is better. Coco-peat is an ideal substrate, which can be set up deep (>10 cm) for the cockroaches to burrow into. Alternatively a shallow substrate (2-3cm) can be given and objects provided in the enclosure for the cockroaches to hide under. Flat pieces of wood or cardboard are suitable, providing they do not become sodden and mouldy. With either method, the substrate should be kept moist, but not soaked. The enclosure should be maintained at 18-24°C.

Life span: Up to 10 years.

Handling: These insects cannot bite and can be handled safely. They should be picked up gently, by coaxing them onto your hand and cradled to prevent them walking off and falling. (A fall from standing height could kill a Giant Burrowing Cockroach).

Reproduction: Pairs can be kept together all year round, and will usually mate out of sight in early summer. Young Giant Burrowing Cockroaches are born live, and can number up to 20. They will stay close to their parents for up to a year, but can be separated at around four months of age.

Common issues: Ensure that dry gum leaves are always available, and offer several different species if possible. Do not handle them more than once daily as this species has been known to suffer from stress from too much human interaction. Weighing your cockroaches weekly will give you a good indication of their state of health; continual weight loss may indicate that a decrease in the level of interaction is required – or that the enclosure conditions are not suitable.

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