

Care guide

Giant Water Spider, Megadolomedes australianus



Giant Water Spiders are large spiders found in water ways along Australia's east coast from Tasmania to north QLD. They are found in creeks and rivers preferring habitats with flowing water rather than still water swamps and dams favoured by their smaller relatives (*Dolomedes spp.*).

These spiders are generally nocturnal, spending the daylight hours hidden within debris and beneath overhanging banks at the water's edge. They are perfectly adapted to life on and around water, and can run rapidly across the surface to capture prey or dive beneath it to escape predators.

Giant Water Spiders are ambush hunters. At night the spiders move onto the water to hunt, usually with their front four legs upon the water's surface, and their other legs anchored to a solid object. They commonly position themselves along the bank or upon rocks and logs jutting out of the water when hunting. They utilise the surface of the water as their 'web' and are acutely sensitive to any vibrations upon it. Insects and other water spiders moving nearby will be pounced upon rapidly. They are also sensitive to small movement beneath the surface and as such are able to detect and prey upon tadpoles and small fish. These spiders can occasionally be found away from water in very moist habitats and hunt upon mossy logs and other forest structures in a similar manner to huntsman spiders.

Females produce a round white egg sac which is held by their fangs and carried around beneath them. They can have hundreds of offspring per egg sac, as the emergent spiderlings are relatively tiny compared with the size of the adults.

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Food: Live insects around ¼ the body size of the spider (crickets are ideal). These are best introduced at night when the spider is hunting. Insects may be introduced onto the surface of the water, but spiders will readily catch insects upon land as well.

Water: If an aquatic set-up is used no additional water is required. If using a moss substrate only, mist spraying is required daily.

Enclosure: Adults will require an enclosure with around 30cm x 20cm floor space. These spiders also require sufficient height to be able to hang whilst moulting and structures to climb to do so. There are two basic options for housing this species. The first is to have an aquatic area with a bank or structure (log /rock) for the spider to hunt from. A small aquarium/terrarium would be suitable for this as long as there is sufficient space to provide both regions. The second option is to have moist terrestrial habitat; damp sphagnum moss is ideal for this and can be used as a substrate throughout the entire enclosure.

Temperature/humidity: This species will do best at 24 – 28 degrees C, but will tolerate 16 – 24 degrees and have a slower growth rate. Humidity is best maintained between 60-80%. This is very important if using the second option of housing (above) to avoid dehydration.

Life span: Up to 2 years

Handling: Direct handling is not recommended. Although these spiders are not dangerously venomous and are quite timid, adults do have large fangs and could give a painful bite. They are typically skittish and fast moving. If you need to transfer them, they can be guided into a jar or plastic container. This is best done in a clear open space so that the spider is easily recaptured if it does escape.

Reproduction: Pairing suitable adults may be done any time of the year in captivity. Pairing them requires a large enough enclosure to allow the male to be introduced well away from the female so that he can make his own way towards her. Cramped conditions may lead to the female consuming the male before mating occurs. The male will need to climb under the female to mate using his pedipalps. Mating usually takes place upon a solid structure, therefore an enclosure with an entire moss substrate is suitable for this process. Spiderling hatch after about 30 days after the production of the egg sac. They are very small and can escape through standard mesh.

Common issues: These spiders are prone to dehydration if housed without water – care must be taken to mist spray every day whilst maintaining the substrate moisture and humidity.