

Care guide

Lichen Huntsman, *Panderbetes gracilis*



Lichen Huntsman Spiders are superbly camouflaged ambush hunters. They are a relatively small huntsman, growing to a body length of around 15mm, with a leg span of around 50mm. They are found in north eastern regions of Australia in rainforests, on the lichen encrusted tree trunks. They feed on a wide range of other invertebrates including moths, crickets, mantids, cockroaches and other spiders.

These spiders are extremely fast, and have the ability to run forwards or sideways with incredible acceleration. They are covered in fine sensory hairs which are extremely sensitive to air movement. This assists them in detecting the movement of prey and the approach of predators. They also have an array of thick clustered hairs that serve to aid their camouflage by breaking up the visual outline of their body.

Like other huntsmen, this species lays its eggs encased within a silk egg sac. They do this exposed upon the tree trunks by ensuring that their egg sac is also well camouflaged. Egg sacs are guarded by mothers day and night until the young emerge. The spiderlings emerge 30 - 60 days after being laid (eggs develop faster in warmer conditions). The mass of spiderlings cluster around their mother for a short period of time before dispersing. Chance meetings of the siblings after dispersal will often result in cannibalism.

These spiders grow by shedding their outer skeleton (exoskeleton). This process is called ecdysis or moulting. To moult successfully they need to hang uninterrupted beneath a leaf or branch. Their colour darkens and they stop feeding a few days before moulting, and once they begin to moult they usually complete the process in about 10 minutes. They usually will not feed for about 24 hours after moulting. Males and females can be identified as they mature; males have enlarged bulbs on the ends of their pedipalps (feelers) which females lack, and males tend to have thin bodies and longer legs.

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Food: Live insects. Small crickets, cockroaches, moths and flies are ideal. The food insects should be no larger than 1/3 of the size of your spider. Feeding twice a week is recommended, but young spiders will feed more often when they are growing. Remove live insects from your enclosure if your spider is not hungry.

Water: Mist spray lightly around your spider every second day – it will drink the droplets.

Enclosure: The enclosure should have a vertical 'tree trunk' in it so the spider has a suitable position to reside. This should have a diameter of at least 50mm, height is not so important. The enclosure needs to be large enough to allow your spider to shed its exoskeleton properly. An ideal enclosure should be higher than it is wide. Jars or plastic containers make great homes for young spiders, and plastic terrariums are good for larger specimens. Ensure the enclosure is not placed in direct sunlight as this may cause it to overheat. Make sure there is plenty of ventilation in your enclosure; fly wire mesh is ideal, but ensure there are no gaps which allow the spider to get out.

Temperature: This species will do best at 24 – 28 degrees C, but will tolerate lower temperatures and have a slower growth rate.

Life span: 1-2 years.

Handling: Direct handling is not recommended due to fragility and escape risk. Although these spiders are not dangerously venomous and are quite timid, they can move extremely quickly and escape easily if handled out of your enclosure. If you need to transfer them, they can be guided into a jar or plastic container.

Reproduction: Individuals should be kept separately unless breeding. Adult males will mate with adult females at 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 female will produce an egg sac after mating, the time between mating and egg deposition can vary from a few weeks to months.

Common issues: Due to their flattened bodies and fast speed, these spiders are excellent escape artists! Ensure there are no gaps around the lid or doors of your 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