

## Care guide

### White-kneed King Cricket, *Penalva flavocalceata*



White-kneed King Crickets are common inhabitants of the tropical rainforests of eastern Australia. They have large hind legs with white patches on their knees, giving them their name. They grow to around 50mm long and can weigh up to 10g with females being larger than males.

White-kneed King Crickets are rarely seen during the day, as they spend the daylight hours in burrows in the soil. They will emerge at night to feed on fruit, nuts, leaves and scavenge on dead animals. White-kneed king crickets lack wings so cannot fly, but are capable of jumping great distances – more than 1 metre in a single bound.

In order to reproduce, male White-kneed King Crickets will transfer a spermatophore to the female. A spermatophore is a white or clear mass that can sometimes be seen at the tip of the female's abdomen after mating has occurred. It contains sperm to fertilise the eggs. Female White-kneed King Crickets lay small oval-shaped eggs in the substrate using their ovipositor. The ovipositor (pictured above) is long, thin and extends from the abdomen of the females. The young will hatch out looking like miniature versions of their parents, and will shed their exoskeletons to grow.

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**Food:** Orthopteran Food Mix, small pieces of cut fruit, and occasional dead insects.

**Water:** Mist spray the substrate once a day. This will keep the enclosure damp, and the crickets will drink from the moisture in the ground. You could also use a small dish with a damp sponge or cotton wool ball within it.

**Enclosure:** The enclosure needs to be about 25 cm H x 35 cm W x 20 cm L. The base of the enclosure should be covered in a substrate of coco-peat (available from garden supply shops) to a depth of 10cm minimum. The substrate always needs to be kept damp. You may like to embed some pulpy wood into the substrate and use large dried leaves on top of the substrate as shelter areas. You could also use bark shelters.

**Life span:** About 3-5 years.

**Handling:** These crickets have large mandibles capable of delivering a painful bite and handling is not recommended. They also have large spines on their legs which can pierce the skin if struck with them by an alarmed cricket.

**Reproduction:** These crickets can be housed in groups, so once mature mating will occur. The male will seek out the female, grasp the ovipositor at the tip of the abdomen and deposit a spermatophore. After mating, the female will begin laying eggs into the substrate one by one. The eggs are rice-like in appearance, and should begin hatching 4-6 weeks after being laid. The hatchling crickets will take 16-24 months to mature.

**Common issues:** If keeping these crickets in groups of high numbers, you may find that fighting will occur where some individuals will be injured or nibbled on. If this happens, your crickets will need some more space, so divide your group into two separate enclosures.

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

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