

Care guide

Rainforest Tree Katydid (*Phricta spinosa*)



Rainforest Tree Katydids are common inhabitants of the tropical rainforests of eastern Australia. They are often known as Spiny Tree Crickets because of the abundance of large protective spines covering their body and limbs. They have extremely long hind legs with red and black markings on the inner thigh. These are thrust vertically in the air as a defensive gesture, and then used to kick at attackers. They grow to around 60mm long with females being larger than males.

Rainforest Tree Katydids tend to spend the daylight hours motionless, usually lying flat against a tree trunk or branch allowing their excellent camouflage to protect them. They will become active at night and feed upon the foliage and bark of rainforest plants. They will also feed upon fruits when the opportunities arise. Both sexes are capable of jumping relatively long distances, but the light-weight males can also make use of their wings for short flights.

In order to reproduce, male Rainforest Tree Katydids will transfer a spermatophore to the females. A spermatophore is a white-coloured 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. Females lay elongated rice-like eggs in the substrate using their ovipositor, which is a long thin extension protruding from the end of the abdomen. 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. Foliage and bark of a wide variety of plants including various palms, Tree Lucerne (*Cytisus proliferus*), Mirror Bush (*Coprosma repens*), and Happy Wanderer (*Hardenbergia violacea*).

Water: Mist spray the enclosure once a day. This will keep the enclosure damp and the humidity high. The katydids will drink from the moisture on the foliage and branches.

Enclosure: The enclosure needs to be a minimum of 35 cm H x 25cm W x 20 cm D to adequately house 1 or 2 adults. The base of the enclosure can be covered in a substrate of coco-peat (available from garden supply shops) to a depth of at least 8cm. While substrate of this type is not essential, it will accommodate breeding. Sticks and branches should be placed within the enclosure as they are required for the insects to hang from whilst moulting.

Temperature: This species will do best at 24° – 28°C, but will tolerate 16 – 24°C and have a slower growth rate.

Life span: About one year.

Handling: These katydids have powerful mandibles, but are quite timid and are reluctant biters. They can be handled but are unpredictable and may leap away without warning.

Reproduction: These katydids can be housed in groups, so once mature mating will occur. The male will seek out the female, and deposit a spermatophore whilst his abdomen is locked with hers. A week or two after mating the female will begin laying individual eggs into the substrate. The eggs are rice-like in appearance, and will usually hatch about 3 months after being laid. The hatchling katydids will take several months to mature.

Common issues: If keeping these katydids in groups of high numbers, you may find that some individuals are injured or disrupted during the delicate moulting process. If this happens, your katydids will need more space, so divide your group into multiple enclosures.

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