

Care guide

Assassin Bugs (Reduviidae)



Assassin bugs are predatory insects belonging to the family Reduviidae and there are hundreds of species throughout Australia. Some species are highly specialised feeding upon specific prey such as ants, while other species are generalist predators, capturing any suitably sized insect which they encounter.

They have a large proboscis which they use to impale their prey. They then inject a venom which kills their prey and liquefies its internal structures so they can be sucked out. Assassin bugs are stealth and ambush hunters and will often stalk prey in an ominous and assassin-like manner. The proboscis is revealed and raised like a dagger moments before the final strike.

The Hellbender Assassin lives upon large rock outcrops and tree trunks and resides within crevices. Little is known about the Hellbender Assassin's habits in the wild, or the type of prey it naturally feeds on. They may feed on insects such as ants regularly encountered in their habitats.

Unlike many species of assassin bugs, Hellbender assassins are communal and live in groups comprising of up to 50 individuals. They will cluster together which no doubt offers a level of protection from their own predators. They will often share their prey with other individuals in their group.

Eggs are laid in small clusters containing a dozen or so individuals which hatch a month or so later. The emergent nymphs are miniature versions of their parents and feed in the same manner. Unlike adults, nymphs lack wings which do not appear until their final moult.

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Food: The easiest captive food source is freshly dead insects such as crickets or mealworms. Place the fresh dead insect near your assassin bug on a stable surface. Do so with the minimum of disturbance as the assassin bugs are timid and easily scared away. If live food is to be used, small harmless insects are best, particularly those with limited movement.

Enclosure: A small terrarium is ideal, with a moisture absorbent substrate (coco-peat or sphagnum moss). It is best to have a large piece of bark or piece of wood for the assassin to climb upon. A flat surface to place the food insects upon is a worthy addition.

Water: Mist spray the enclosure around your insect once a day – it will drink the droplets if water is required. Misting will also maintain moisture in the substrate and the humidity.

Temperature: The safe range is 22 – 28° C, but will tolerate periods of cooler temperatures (overnight lows) of 12°C as long as the temperatures rises back into the safe range during the day. An external basking lamp providing a warm end in the enclosure seems beneficial to this species. Take care not to over-heat the enclosure or cause a fire hazard if using a heat lamp.

Life span: Around a year

Handling: Due to their painful bite direct handling is not recommended. Assassin bugs can be easily coaxed into a small container in order to move them.

Common issues: These insects are easily frightened and may be deterred from eating if care isn't taken. Ensure that food insects are placed slowly and carefully near your assassin bug to ensure that it isn't scared away.