

Care guide

Tiger Centipede, *Ethmostigmus rubripes*



Tiger centipedes are a colour form of *Ethmostigmus rubripes*, a species found throughout the north eastern tropics of Australia. This species also occurs in brown through to green colour forms. They are very large, and are regarded as one of the largest species in Australia. They can grow to around 170mm in body length.

Like most centipedes, these are very fast and are active roaming hunters. They tend to be most active on warm wet nights and are seldom seen throughout the dry months in the north of Australia. They hunt using two strategies; sitting still and ambushing prey as it wanders by, and actively seeking out prey in nooks and crannies throughout their habitat. Prey is detected using the centipede's highly sensitive antennae, and once detected is rapidly set upon. The centipede will clasp and secure its prey using its sharp pointed legs, while simultaneously biting it with its venom claws. (Venom claws are the pair of modified legs under the centipede's head which are utilised as fangs to deliver venom). Large prey will often be secured by the centipede's entire body. In the wild these centipedes prey on a wide variety of animals, particularly invertebrates, but will also take small vertebrates such as frogs and geckos.

Centipedes grow by shedding their outer skeleton (exoskeleton). This process is called ecdysis or moulting. Their colour darkens and they stop feeding prior to moulting. They will usually do this in a retreat underground, under a log or some other well protected position. After moulting the centipede will be quite pale and vulnerable until the new exoskeleton hardens, and they will not hunt or feed until this has occurred.

These centipedes lay eggs; around 20 - 40 in a clutch. The female will spend the duration of the incubation (40 - 50 days) curled around them, and then a month or so curled around the helpless white juveniles. Her care is finally over once the young moult and move off to start independent lives.

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Food: Live insects; crickets and cockroaches are ideal. Insects about ¼ the size of your centipede are a good size. Feed once or twice a week, however expect your centipede to become disinterested in food at times. If this occurs, remove any uneaten live insects from the enclosure. A well fed centipede will have a 'full' rounded body.

Water: Mist spray lightly around one end of your centipede's enclosure to keep it damp – it will drink the droplets if thirsty.

Enclosure: Plastic terrariums, glass aquariums or plastic tubs are all suitable enclosures. If using a plastic tub, ventilation can be achieved easily by cutting out a section of the lid and replacing it with aluminium fly mesh.

The most critical item is an escape proof lid. Centipedes are notorious for escaping and are able to squeeze through small gaps. They cannot climb smooth surfaces such as glass and plastic, but they can climb silicon in the corners of aquariums and can reach up walls to ~ 90% of their body length.

Coco-peat is an ideal substrate and needs to be deep enough (at least several centimetres) to hold moisture and allow the centipede to burrow. You can also add items like flat pieces of bark on the surface for your centipede to shelter under. Create a moisture gradient within your substrate; a moist end and a dry end. This is important as it allows the centipede to find a suitable microhabitat within your enclosure.

Temperature: This species will be most active at 24 – 26° C, but will tolerate 16 – 20° and have a slower growth rate. They can also tolerate temperatures below 16°C for short periods, but avoid exposure to high temperatures (above 30°C.)

Life span: 3-5 years.

Handling: **Direct handling is not recommended. These centipedes are venomous and are ready biters.** Centipedes can be picked up using forceps with extreme care and delicate pressure to avoid injuring the animal. Adding padding to forceps is a good way of safeguarding against injury. They can also be captured and moved by guiding them into a container with a sealable lid.

Common issues: Remove uneaten live insects from the enclosure if the centipede is showing no interest in them. This avoids the insects interrupting the centipede during the delicate moulting process. Interruptions can cause deformities and death.

Ensure your enclosure is secure and has no points at which the centipede can escape.

For more information contact Minibeast Wildlife at info@minibeastwildlife.com.au