

Care guide

Rainforest Scorpion, *Hormurus waigiensis*



Rainforest Scorpions are found in the northern tropical regions of Australia, and live within crevices in rocks where their flattened bodies allow them to hide safely from predators. They hunt at night by ambushing small animals (usually insects) that pass within reach.

Like other scorpions this species is venomous, however their venom is only mild and they are not considered dangerous to humans. Prey is captured and often killed using their powerful pincers (pedipalps), with the sting only being used for large or vigorous prey.

Scorpions grow by shedding their outer skeleton (exoskeleton). This process is called ecdysis or moulting. They usually do this out of sight in a safe place, and will often moult at night. During the moulting process they are very vulnerable to attack from other animals and cannot defend themselves.

One incredible part of the life cycle of this species is the mating ritual. Male and female scorpions will lock pincers and perform a dance known as the 'promenade à deux'. During this ritual the male deposits a sperm capsule on the ground called a spermatophore. He guides the female over it until she collects it within her reproductive opening. Many scorpions have very long gestation periods, and for this species it is 9-12 months. This species can have up to 20 babies which are born live. They move on to their mother's back shortly after birth, and remain there for several weeks before dispersing to begin independent predatory lives.

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Food: Live or freshly dead insects once or twice weekly. Crickets and cockroaches are ideal. Insects about ¼ the body size of the scorpion are recommended. Dead insects may be fed to the scorpion via forceps or tweezers, but they will also pick up freshly dead insects off the ground. Remove any uneaten food or leftovers after 24 hours.

Water: The substrate in your scorpions' enclosure must be kept moist at all times. It should be moist enough that the substrate clumps together if pressed between the fingers. The scorpion will drink from the moist substrate, but you can also add a dish (or bottle lid) with a moist cotton wool ball or sponge.

Enclosure: A plastic terrarium is an ideal enclosure for your scorpion, with a minimum size of 20cmH x 30cmW x 20cmD. Place coco-peat or similar substrate in the bottom of the enclosure to a depth of around 3cm, and keep the substrate moist throughout. Place a flat rock or bark in the enclosure as a shelter for your scorpion.

Temperature: This species will do best at 22 – 28° C. (Overnight or brief periodic cooling to between 10-20°C is during winter is not harmful as long as daytime temperatures reach above 20°C).

Humidity: 60-90%

Life span: 5-10 years.

Handling: Although these scorpions are not aggressive, handling is not recommended as they are mildly venomous.

Reproduction: Mature males have a tooth and corresponding notch in each chela (claw), females lack this. A male will court the female using jerky movements, and he will clasp the willing female by the claws and guide her to a spermatophore he has deposited on the ground via a 'dance'. Once the female is perfectly positioned with her reproductive opening in contact with the spermatophore, the male will catapult the sperm into her. Once mating has occurred, remove the male. If mating is not observed, watch the condition of the female over the 9-12 month gestation – if her abdomen appears to be getting larger, she may be gravid. Up to 20 live babies will be born and will climb onto their mothers' back and ride there for around 2 weeks. The babies should be separated from the mother once they leave her side and start wandering on their own.

Common issues: This species can be cannibalistic at times, so they should be kept individually to avoid issues. Pairing for breeding should be done under close supervision. These scorpions are good climbers and will cling to anything that has a rough surface, but will not climb smooth surfaces such as glass. Live food insects can interrupt the scorpion moulting, so remove insects if they aren't eaten.