

Care guide

Giant Water Bug, *Lethocerus insulanus*



Giant Water Bugs are found in the northern tropics and across some semi-arid/arid regions of northern and central Australia. They are the biggest 'true bugs' in Australia; the biggest member of the order Hemiptera.

Giant Water Bugs are fierce predators and are akin to underwater praying mantids. They have excellent eyesight and powerful raptorial front legs to enable the capture of prey. They are capable of capturing animals up to and beyond their own size, and large adult water bugs often capture fish, crustaceans, tadpoles and frogs. They are also highly cannibalistic. Prey is subdued by a lethal injection via the bug's sharp proboscis. Digestive enzymes are also injected into the prey via the proboscis, and the resultant liquids sucked back out.

These large insects spend most of their time motionless underwater, waiting for prey to pass by, however adults can fly well and leave the water to find mates or new habitat. While underwater, these insects obtain air through an extendable 'siphon' at the end of their bodies.

Breeding can take place at any time of year. The female lays up to 80 eggs on plant stems or sticks above the water line. This is done in the presence of a male and mating appears to take place at this time. The male remains on guard below the surface of the water until the eggs hatch. Nymphs hatch after a short 10 day incubation and look like miniature adults without wings. They mature after moulting five times in as little as four months.

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Food: A wide variety of aquatic insects (water boatmen and backswimmers are ideal for young nymphs). Adults can be fed adult crickets and cockroaches either dropped into the water or via forceps. Feeding should take place at least once per week; two or three substantial meals per week are ideal. A well fed individual has a rounded abdomen (on the underside). An individual with a strongly keeled underside requires feeding.

Enclosure: The enclosure should allow the water bug to perch on objects just below the surface in order to breathe via the siphon on its tail, and have a sufficient depth of water around them to allow free movement. An adult would require a minimum of one litre of water. The water should be cleaned or replaced regularly, particularly after feeding. Filtration is optional, but aeration is not necessary. **A firm-fitting ventilated lid is a necessity to prevent escape.**

Temperature: This species will comfortably tolerate temperatures 15 – 30 degrees Celsius. The safe range is 22-26 degrees.

Life span: About 1-2 years.

Handling: This species can be handled but with extreme care as they are capable of delivering an extremely painful bite. They should be gripped on the outer margins of the body using the thumb and forefinger, taking care to keep fingers out of reach of the raptorial legs and proboscis.

Reproduction: This species should be housed individually unless breeding is being attempted. Sexing is very difficult as there is no clear sexual dimorphism in this species. Females are usually larger than males; males approx 45 -55mm, females 50 – 70mm. Pairs should be fed extremely well before being introduced, and suitable egg laying sites should be present in the breeding enclosure. Sticks and rigid plant stems should protrude at least 10cm above the water line. A breeding aquarium should be large enough to give both insects plenty of space to reduce the risk of cannibalism.

Common issues: Escape can occur quite easily if a lid is not present or not well secured.

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