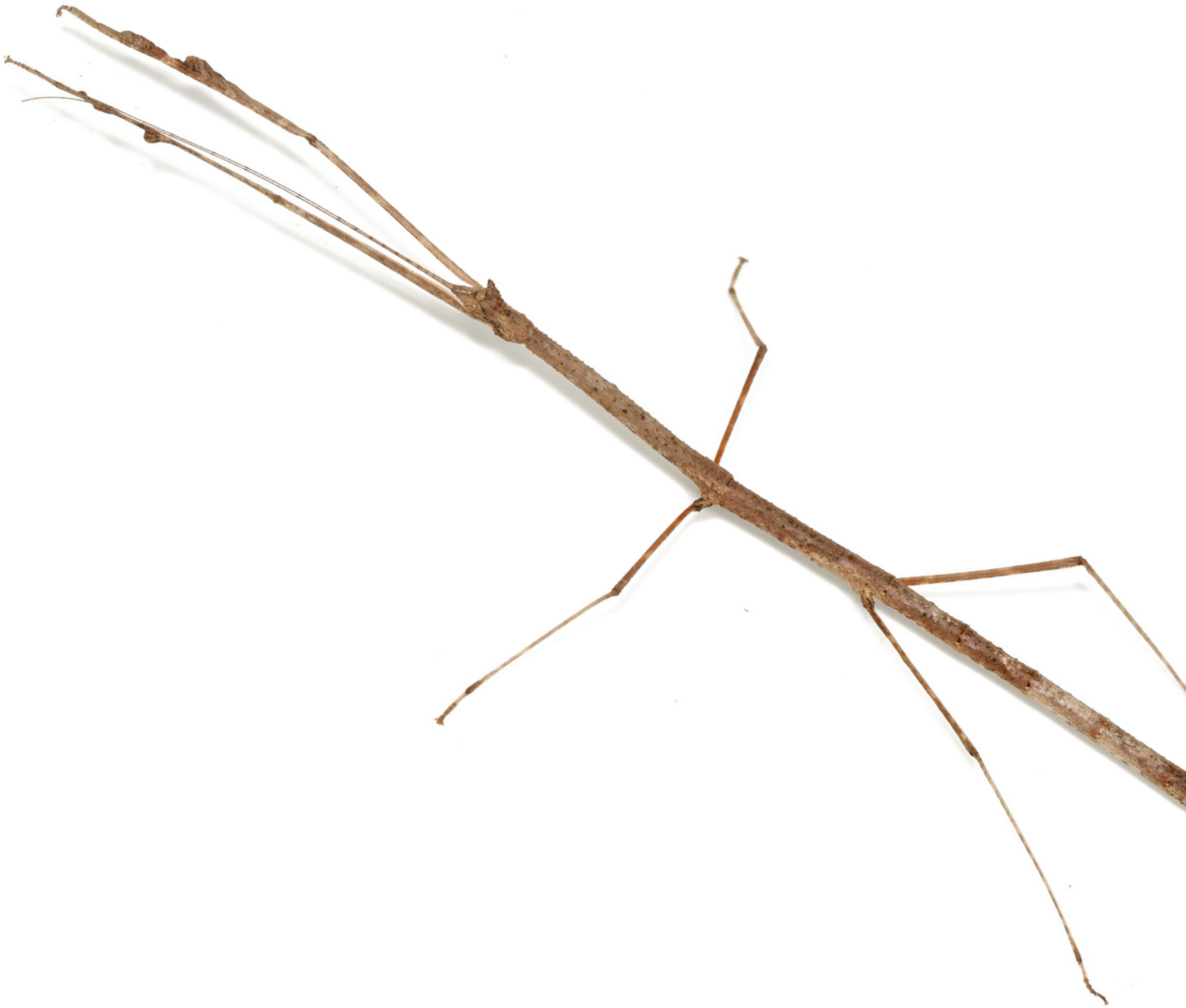
CARE GUIDE

MINIBEAST WILDLIFE



LIVING TWIG

Austrocarausius mercurius

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GIANT NORTHERN STICK INSECT

Acrophylla wuelfingi

PROFILE

These thin phasmids are remarkably like twigs. Their body shape, colour and small bumps on their surface all help to make this species to blend into their surroundings. If disturbed they will let go of the branch they are clinging to and fall to the forest floor. They will remain motionless for long periods of time and even remain still with their body rigid just like a twig if handled.

Both sexes of this species are wingless, and are quite similar to one another until they mature. The females (picture above) grow larger and thicker than the males. Adult males have less textured bodies which are greenish in colouration.

Like other phasmids, they have a very interesting reproductive cycle, beginning with the eggs being tossed individually by females from the trees down to the rainforest floor. The tiny eggs look very much like plant seeds and may be collected by ants (along with those of other stick insect species). If collected by ants, the eggs are stored below ground in the ant nest. This is beneficial to the eggs as it offers a degree of protection from predators.

Whether it hatches within the rainforest leaf litter or underground in an ant chamber, the tiny stick insect (nymph) must make its way up through the maze of obstacles up into a nearby tree. At this point in life the nymphs have a very strong instinct to climb upwards, which ensures that they head in the right direction.

Once in a tree the nymph begins to feed on leaves and grows by shedding its outer skeleton (exoskeleton). This process is called ecdysis or moulting. To moult successfully the insect needs to hang uninterrupted beneath a leaf or branch. This process usually takes 10 – 20 minutes to complete.

An amazing fact about many stick insects is that they are parthenogenetic. This means that females don't need to be mated to reproduce. So if you only have a single female, she can still produce young - replicas of herself.

FOOD

Various species of gum (Eucalyptus spp.), Cadagi (Corymbia torreliana), Guava (Psidium spp.), and Brush Cherry (Syzygium australe). Ensure fresh, healthy leaves are always available to your insect. Don't let the leaves dry out before you change them. The leaves can be put into a jar of water to keep them fresh for as long as possible. Make sure the jar has a lid or covering with holes in it to stop the young stick insects from falling in and drowning. Offering two or three species of food plant when you first get your stick insects is a good way finding one that they like. Food plant should be changed over at least once a week.

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WATER

Mist-spray the leaves around your insect once a day – it will drink the droplets if thirsty.

ENCLOSURE

The enclosure needs to be large enough to allow your stick insect to shed its exoskeleton properly. An enclosure should be higher than it is wide, as stick insects like to climb upwards. Minimum size requirements are 30cm high x 30cm wide x 30cm deep. A number of individuals can be housed together as long as each insect has sufficient space to hang and feed without disturbing others. Place the enclosure in a spot where it gets a bit of daylight each day, but be careful it doesn't overheat in direct sunlight. Make sure there is plenty of ventilation in your enclosure.

SUBSTRATE

Not required, but it can help with clean up to put some paper down on the bottom of the enclosure to catch the frass (poo) and leaf material that falls to the ground.

TEMPERATURE

This species will do best at 22 – 26° C, but will tolerate 10 – 20° C and have a slower growth rate.

CLEANING AND MAINTENANCE

Remove frass (poo) and fallen leaf material from the bottom of the enclosure once a week. This can be done when the food plant is changed over. If you have adult females in the enclosure, collect any eggs present on the enclosure floor.

HANDLING

They should be picked up gently, by coaxing them onto your hand. They always prefer to climb up, so use this to your advantage when picking them up and putting them back onto the leaves. They do have small hooks on their feet that they use to hang on with – these may tickle a little. Larger specimens may be picked up gently using the thumb and index finger to grip them mid-body. This is particularly useful if a Living Twig drops defensively and plays dead (mimics a twig).

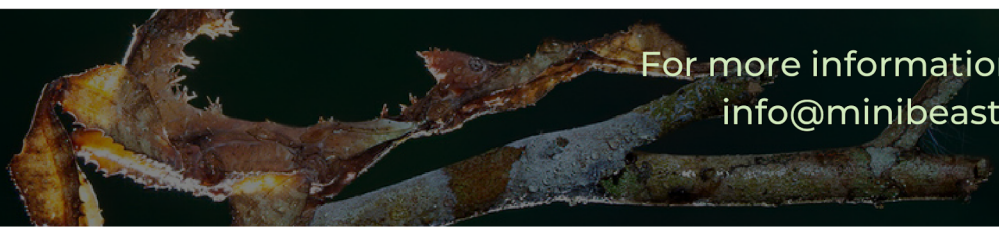
COMMON ISSUES

This species will readily drop from foliage when disturbed – be aware of this when changing to your insects food plant to prevent losing them.

10 - 12 months life span

These animals are captive bred, and should not be released into the wild

50-60%



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