

Care guide

Detachable Penis Spider, *Nephilengys papuana*



The unusual name for this spider originates from the quirky behaviour of the tiny male spiders. During mating the males break off a pedipalp (one of their specialised 'feeler' appendages used for mating) and leave it locked into the female. This prevents other male spiders mating with that particular female.

The webs built by this species are quite unusual in that they have two distinct styles merged together. They produce a conventional orb-web linked to a less orderly lattice of silk that leads to a funnel-like retreat. The retreat is often a hole or crevice in a tree trunk but may also be any dark crevice upon a human structure.

Female Detachable Penis Spiders are often seen sitting in their orb-webs or just outside the retreat during the day but are quick to move into the retreat if disturbed. Closer inspection of the web will often reveal the presence of one or more tiny males, that may be missing or both pedipalps if mating has occurred.

The spiders will catch an array of insects that become trapped in their webs. Due to the webs structure, it is often flying insects that become trapped although crawling insects such as crickets and cockroaches may be captured also. Eggs are laid within a fluffy bag-like egg sac (yellow-white in colour) which is suspended in the lattice section of the web. The egg sac can contain a hundred or more eggs. The young emerge around a month after laying, the spiderlings will cluster together nearby usually for a day or so before they disperse to create their own webs.

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Food: Live insects. As this is a web-building spider, prey is best offered by being trapped in the spider's web. Flies and small moths are ideal, but crickets can be used if they are tossed into the web. The food insects should be no larger than the size of your spider, ideally about 1/3 to 1/2 its size. If spiders are reluctant to approach prey struggling in their web after several minutes the food may be too large. Feeding twice a week is recommended, but young spiders may feed more often when they are growing.

Water: Mist spray lightly around your spider every second day – it will drink the droplets from the web.

Enclosure: These spiders do well within mesh enclosures, as it allows enough space for the spider to construct the web without allowing the spider to wander away. A suitable enclosure would be no smaller than 30cm x 30cm x 30cm and is suitable all sizes of this species. A structure for a retreat may be added into the enclosure (vertical piece of bark etc) but is not essential as the spiders will fill the enclosure with silk and use a corner for their retreat. They are more visible without a retreat.

Temperature: The safe temperature zone for this species is 20° – 32°C, but will tolerate 8°– 36° for limited periods. A cycle with higher temperatures during the day and lower temps at night is ideal.

Humidity: This is tropical species - high humidity is required. 65 – 85% is recommended.

Life span: 1-2 years.

Handling: These spiders can be handled gently if required, however handling unnecessarily is not recommended. They are mildly venomous, but are not aggressive and are reluctant to bite.

Common issues: Ensure insects that are used as food are being trapped in the web – crickets wandering around the walls of the enclosure may not be accessible to the spider.

For more information contact Minibeast Wildlife at
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