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African Burrowing Scorpions (*Opisththalmus* spp.)

Infrequently Encountered Burrowers

African burrowing scorpions are a genus of small to large, heavy bodied scorpions consisting of approximately 60 species. Other common names also occasionally include the hissing scorpions, tri-colored scorpions, and African yellow legged scorpions. They can vary in color from yellowish, to brownish, brownish yellow, or blackish with lighter colored chelae and legs.

Although these species can have a mild to strong venom and painful sting, stings and human encounters with African burrowing scorpions are uncommon due to their fossorial nature. This genera of scorpions are also well known for their ability to create deep, and intricate holes or burrows, hence their common names. The most commonly kept and available species in the pet trade are perhaps *O. boehmi*, *O. glabrifrons*, *O. carinatus*, and *O. wahlbergii*. Furthermore, as with many other scorpions, emperor scorpions also contain properties within their exo-skeletons that enable them to glow a turquoise bluish-green under a fluorescent UV light. These scorpions also possess additional sensory hairs on their claws, legs, and tail that enable them to detect the vibrations of potential prey through the air and the ground.

Taxonomy

Life: All living, physical, and animate entities

Domain: Eukaryota

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Arthropoda

Subphylum: Chelicerata

Class: Arachnida

Order: Scorpiones

Family: Scorpionidae

Genus: *Opisththalmus*

Species: *Opisththalmus* spp.*

*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.

Lifespan and Longevity

African burrowing scorpions can attain longevity of 5 to 10 years or more if cared for correctly.

Distribution and Habitat

African burrowing scorpions are a medium sized to large genus of scorpions consisting of approximately 60 species indigenous to southern to eastern Africa, although most species occur in southern Africa. More specific ranges and locality information is largely dependent upon the

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precise species. Within these ranges, these species of scorpions occupy the drier, arid to semi-arid deserts, scrublands, and grasslands, to open forests and savannahs, where they occupy self-excavated burrows, burrows constructed by other animals, and underneath vegetation, rocks, logs, and other ground debris.

Conservation Status

Not Evaluated for the IUCN Red List (NE) or otherwise Data Deficient (DD).

Legal and Regulatory Status (*Subject to Change)

Consult with your local, municipal, and state ordinances and regulations for any ownership restrictions.

Experience Level Required

Intermediate/Moderate to Advanced.

Size

African burrowing scorpions are medium sized to large scorpion species, reaching anywhere from 1 ½ to 6 inches on average.

Housing and Enclosure

Provide a sturdy, secure, and escape proof terrarium or enclosure 5 to 10 gallons in size with a secure top for an adult scorpion. Several of the acrylic displays and enclosures that are now manufactured for housing arachnids, insects, and other invertebrates can also be used. It is not suggested that burrowing scorpions be housed communally, as they are aggressive and territorial towards one another. Acceptable substrate to use can include slightly moist pesticide play sand or aquarium sand, coconut fiber, peat moss, or potting soil mixtures 3 to 4 inches or greater in depth to provide for these scorpion's burrowing habits. Decorations and/or other cage furnishings and hide boxes, cork, rock, or bark slabs can also be included as well, even though no additional hides are required for these scorpions, and they will construct their own burrows. A fairly small, shallow water dish can also be provided, and should be cleaned regularly. Maintain humidity at 60 to 70% with some sphagnum moss as well if needed.

Temperature, Lighting, and Humidity

Most species of scorpions have simple and undemanding heating and lighting requirements in captivity, and do not require additional UVA/UVB lighting, although providing it can be greatly beneficial for your scorpion's health, immune system, and overall wellness. African burrowing scorpions do best at room temperature between 75 to 85 degrees. For any supplemental heating that may be needed, use a low wattage incandescent or UVA/UVB bulb, radiant or ceramic heat emitter, or UTH (under tank heating element). More specific lighting, heating, and humidity product suggestions and recommendations that can best suit one's needs, as well as those of one's animals can be given as well.

Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition

Insectivorous to Carnivorous; In the wild, burrowing scorpions are primarily insectivorous, meaning they eat insects and other invertebrates. They will also occasionally eat smaller vertebrates as well if they can catch and subdue them. In captivity, these scorpions can be fed a variety of appropriately sized feeder insects such as crickets, roaches, mealworms, superworms, and waxworms. Feeder insects should be gut-loaded in order to increase their optimal nutritional value. Any uneaten food items should be cleaned and removed after a day or two. Their feeding frequency will depend on the age, size, and overall health of your animal. Use care as to not

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overfeed even invertebrates, as obesity and other health related issues can still become an issue with them. More specific dietary and supplementary product suggestions and recommendations that can best suit one's needs, as well as those of one's animals can be given as well.

Handling

African burrowing scorpions are a nervous to defensive species, and will sting readily if threatened or disturbed. Handling these scorpions should therefore be done carefully, or otherwise is not suggested. Their venom can range from mild to strong depending on the species, and they can deliver a painful sting. Scorpions in general are fragile animals, and accidentally dropping one can result in the rupture of its internal organs and/or exoskeleton, causing death to your scorpion. Always seek medical attention from any apparent allergic reaction to a sting from this or any scorpion species.

Also be sure to practice basic cleanliness and hygiene associated with proper husbandry after touching or handling any animals or animal enclosures to prevent the possibility of contracting salmonellosis or any other zoonotic pathogens

Contact

Authored by Eric Roscoe. For any additional questions, comments, and/or concerns regarding this animal, group of animals, or this care sheet, please email and contact the Madison Area Herpetological Society at info@madisonherps.org

Disclaimer: Note that the information provided in these, or any care sheets, are not intended to be all-exhaustive, and further research and care should always be sought and provided when it comes to any species one may prospectively be interested in. These care sheets are also not intended to serve as substitutes for professional veterinary medical care and husbandry should any animal require it. Always seek proper and professional veterinary care for any animal should the need arise, and be prepared ahead of time for any and all husbandry costs and expenses that may occur with any animal beyond the initial purchase. Any animal owned is ultimately a matter of personal/individual care and responsibility. MAHS cannot make any claims or guarantees regarding any information in this care sheet therein. This care sheet may be reprinted or redistributed only in its entirety, including any and all MAHS logos and disclaimers. Last updated on: 15 December 2018.

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