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Giant Centipedes (Order Scolopendromorpha)

Fast and Many Legged Hunters

Centipedes are elongated, segmented arthropod invertebrates that can vary considerably in size, color, and appearance depending on species. There are roughly 8,000 centipede species known and described, from tropical and sub-tropical regions to temperate areas throughout most of worldwide. All centipedes, however, have a modified pair of claw or pincer like appendages beneath their rounded heads called forcipules, a long pair of antennae, typically one pair of legs per segment (anywhere from 30 to over 300), and telson like rear appendages. Several different orders and families of centipedes are known, but the order Scolopendromorpha are the most commonly kept due to their large size and colorations. Most of the Scolopendromorph centipedes display brighter aposematic coloration of brown, reddish brown, blackish, to olive brown body segments and brightly colored red, yellow, orange, or whitish heads, antennae, and limbs. Unlike millipedes, which they may be confused with, centipedes are fast moving, aggressive predators of many invertebrates and even other small animals, using their speed, venom, and forcipules to capture and overpower prey, including even small vertebrates.

Taxonomy

Life: All living, physical, and animate entities

Domain: Eukaryota

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Arthropoda

Subphylum: Myriapoda

Class: Chilopoda

Order: Scolopendromorpha

Family: Scolopendridae

**Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

Lifespan and Longevity

Lifespan may vary depending on the size and species of centipede, but larger centipedes found in the pet trade may live up to 5 to 10 years under the correct conditions.

Distribution and Habitat

Centipedes can be found in moist and humid microhabitats in temperate to tropical areas throughout most of the world, with the larger species of Scolopendromorphs being found in the southwestern United States, Mexico through Central and South America, and much of southern

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to southeastern Asia, and Australia depending on species.

Conservation Status

Conservation status dependent upon the species. Some species are IUCN Least Concern (LC). Some are IUCN Near Threatened (NT), Conservation Dependent (CD), Vulnerable (VU), Endangered (EN), to Critically Endangered (CE). Some Not Evaluated for the IUCN Red List (NE) or otherwise Data Deficient (DD).

Experience Level Required

Novice/Beginner to Advanced (depending on species).

Size

Centipedes can vary greatly in size from less than 1 inch to 12 to 16 inches or more in the larger, more commonly kept Scolopendromorphs.

Housing and Enclosure

Provide a sturdy and secure escape proof yet adequately ventilated enclosure, such as a 5 to 20 gallon terrarium for most commonly kept species. There are many substrates that can be used to house centipedes including orchard bark, potting soil, sphagnum moss, vermiculite, or any combination thereof for tropical to desert species of centipedes. Furnishings can be provided, but ensure any live plants chosen are non-toxic to centipedes and are sturdy and firmly planted. Provide at least 2 to 3 inches of substrate that can retain humidity moderately well, and ample hides such as cork bark hides, slabs, or other log/rock hides. A feeding dish, shallow water dish, and hiding spaces should also be created or provided as well.

Temperature, Lighting, and Humidity

Temperature and humidity requirements for centipedes can vary depending upon the species and where they originate. Most tropical species of centipedes, however, can be maintained at or around room temperature of 75 to 85 degrees F, seldom to exceed 90 degrees F. Maintaining adequate humidity and moisture is a major husbandry consideration in keeping centipedes, as most lack the waxy cuticles that other insects and arachnids possess, and are more prone to desiccation when temperatures become too high or humidity too low. Some desert species requiring higher levels of heating can be provided a low wattage under tank heating element (UTH), radiant or ceramic heat emitter, or incandescent bulb as well. Centipedes are primarily nocturnal to crepuscular, and do not require any additional UVA/UVB lighting or heating. 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; Most species of centipedes are carnivorous, and will feed on a variety of insects and other invertebrates, and even small vertebrates they can catch and overpower. As a captive diet, most feeder insects of appropriate size can be provided including crickets, mealworms, waxworms, roaches, superworms, and fruit flies. They will also eat small, frozen thawed rodents or feeder lizards of appropriate size as well, but give these sparingly. Additional calcium and other vitamin/nutritional elements are typically not required with maintaining centipedes, but can help with exoskeleton growth and development. 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

Centipedes as an order and group can be fast moving and aggressive invertebrates, and thus

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handling is not recommended. Some species are capable of delivering a painful and unpleasant bite/sting and several species are medically significant in terms of their venom. The appropriate tools applied in a gentle manner such as tongs, tweezers, and trap boxes can be used to move centipedes for any necessary reason.

****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

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