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Fishing and Nursery Web Spiders (Family Pisauridae)

Hunters, Fishers, and Caregivers

Nursery web spiders belong to a sizeable and diverse family of large true spiders ranging over most of worldwide in temperate to tropical and sub-tropical areas. Consisting of about 50 genera and many more species, they may often be confused with wolf spiders due to their size, although unlike wolf spiders, members of the nursery web spider family carry their egg sacs via their jaws and pedipalps rather than abdomen, and also have less prominent eyes all approximately the same size. Nursery web spiders earn their name from their reproductive and maternal care habits, where prior to hatching, the female spiders construct a “nursery” tent of webbing where the egg sac is guarded prior to hatching. This family of spiders also consists of the large fishing and raft spiders, which are often aquatic to semi-aquatic, being found in and near water, where they ambush or pursue prey as large as small fish or other small aquatic vertebrates. Many species can also walk on the surface of water by increasing their surface area, and are even excellent divers. These large and distinctive spiders are occasionally maintained in captivity, where they can make for easily kept alternatives to tarantulas for the more experienced arachnid enthusiast.

Taxonomy

Life: All living, physical, and animate entities

Domain: Eukaryota

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Arthropoda

Subphylum: Chelicerata

Class: Arachnida

Order: Araneae

Infraorder: Araneomorphae

Family: Pisauridae

**Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

Lifespan and Longevity

Longevity of most species of true spiders can be variable depending on the species, sex, and reproductive status, with females typically attaining slightly longer longevity than males. Fishing and nursery web spiders may live for as few as only a few months to a little over a year or two. Females of some species can live for up to 5 years.

Distribution and Habitat

Depending upon the exact genera and species, nursery web and fishing spiders can be found in a variety of habitats throughout most of the world. They may be found in coastal or inland habitats including arid to semi-arid deserts, scrublands, open fields and prairies, coastal or barrier beaches, mountain regions, temperate to tropical or sub-tropical forests, and in and around residential, urban and suburban, and agricultural areas. Some species have more specialized microhabitats in which they may occur in as well. Fishing and raft spiders are often found in or near streams, rivers, lakes, ponds, and other wetlands or bodies of water.

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).

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

Most nursery web and fishing spiders are relatively mid-sized to large true spiders, which can vary in size depending on the species, sex, and reproductive status. They may range from 0.4 to 3 ¼ or 4 inches or even larger in size and legspan.

Housing and Enclosure

Nursery web and fishing spiders are quite simple and hardy to house and provide enclosures for. These spiders can be housed in an appropriately sized spiderling vial, plastic container or deli cup to a secure and well ventilated 2 to 5-10 gallon terrarium or enclosure with adequate holes for ventilation. Several of the acrylic displays and enclosures that are now manufactured for housing arachnids, insects, and other invertebrates can also be used. Acceptable substrate to use can include pesticide free potting soil, coconut fiber, vermiculite, or similar substrates 3 to 4 inches in depth. Decorations and/or other cage furnishings can also be included as well, although floor space is more important than height. These spiders will also benefit from branches, horizontal cork bark, and plants for refuge. A fairly small, shallow water dish can also be provided, and should be cleaned regularly as well as regular misting for hydration and humidity, but care should be taken to not over-mist.

Temperature, Lighting, and Humidity

Nursery web and fishing spiders 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 spider's health, immune system, and overall wellness. Most of these spiders are hardy species that do best at room temperature between 70 to 85 degrees. Maintain at 75 to 80% humidity. These species can be kept in moist or dryer conditions. 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). Do not keep them at temperature extremes however. More specific lighting, heating, and humidity product suggestions and recommendations that can best suit one's needs, as well as those of one's

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animals can be given as well.

Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition

Insectivorous to Carnivorous; In the wild, nursery web and fishing spiders are primarily insectivorous to carnivorous, meaning they eat insects and other invertebrates. Larger fishing spiders may consume small fish, and even other small aquatic vertebrates they can capture or ambush. In captivity, these spiders can be fed a variety of appropriately sized feeder insects such as crickets, roaches, moths, fruit flies, other flies, and other small feeder insect items. Fishing spiders can even be given small feeder fish such as minnows, and aquatic insects and their larvae. Feeder insects should be gut-loaded in order to increase their optimal nutritional value. This will promote optimal exoskeleton growth and development. 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 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

Although not overly aggressive or defensive, most fishing and nursery web spiders tend to be potentially skittish and fast moving species, with the potential to inflict a painful or unpleasant bite or becoming lost when handled. Handling these spiders is therefore not recommended. All true spiders are also venomous, and although most may be harmless and not medically significant, the possibility of a severe allergic reaction or heightened sensitive reaction still exists. Thus, these spiders are perhaps best suited for viewing, rather than handling.

****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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