



*Sam Theis

Goliath Bird Eating Tarantula (*Theraphosa blondi*)

Tarantulas the Size of Dinner Plates

Goliath bird eating tarantulas are the largest species of spider worldwide in terms of mass and weight, and second in terms of leg span, with a leg span of up to 10 to 12 inches. This species is obviously a large, terrestrial tarantula species that also frequently burrows deeply into the substrate. It is primarily nocturnal, and can be identified by its fairly nondescript light to dark brown ground, pinkish, to reddish brown color. Goliath bird eaters also lack tibial spurs that are otherwise present on the front most pair of legs on most other tarantula species. This species has earned the common name of “bird eating” from an early account by early 18th century Maria Sibylla Merian depicting this species preying on a hummingbird or other small bird.

When threatened, the Goliath bird eating tarantula will rub the setae and hairs together on their pedipalps and legs to create a hissing sound known as stridulation. They will also kick up irritating urticating hairs from their rear legs and abdomen when threatened as well. Despite their name and reputation, Goliath bird “eaters” will only rarely catch and consume small birds. A large, attractive and semi aggressive species, the Goliath bird eating tarantula is a large, sought after species that does well in captivity when maintained by the intermediate to advanced arachnid or other pet enthusiast.

Taxonomy

Life: All living, physical, and animate entities

Domain: Eukaryota

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Arthropoda

Subphylum: Chelicerata

Class: Arachnida

Order: Araneae

Infraorder: Mygalomorphae

Family: Theraphosidae

Genus: Theraphosa

Species: *Theraphosa blondi**

*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.

Lifespan and Longevity

Males of many tarantula species will often attain life spans of only 5 to 6 years. Females attain considerably longer life spans of 15 to 20 years or more in captivity.

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Distribution and Habitat

The goliath giant bird eating spider is a large species of terrestrial to semi-fossorial New World tarantula indigenous to northern South America. More specifically, this giant species, albeit with a somewhat exaggerated reputation, occurs from Venezuela, to Brazil and Guyana. Within this range, these large tarantula species can be found in upland, tropical to sub-tropical forests and rainforests, to woodlands, 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

Goliath bird eating tarantulas are large tarantulas reaching a total legspan of up to about 9 to 12 inches on average.

Housing and Enclosure

Provide a sturdy, secure, and escape proof terrarium or enclosure 20 to 30 gallons long in size with a secure top for a single adult spider. Several of the acrylic displays and enclosures that are now manufactured for housing arachnids, insects, and other invertebrates can also be used. Spiderlings can be housed in an appropriately sized spiderling vial, plastic container or deli cup with adequate holes for ventilation. 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. This is a primarily terrestrial to burrowing species, but benefits 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.

Temperature, Lighting, and Humidity

Most species of tarantulas 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 tarantula's health, immune system, and overall wellness. Goliath bird eating tarantulas are a species that do best at relatively high humidity levels at 80 to 90%, and at ambient room temperature between 75 to 85 degrees. Approximately one half of the enclosure's substrate can also be moistened or misted as well to help raise or maintain humidity levels. 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, and despite their fearsome sounding name, Goliath bird-eating tarantulas are primarily insectivorous, meaning they eat mostly insects and other

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invertebrates. They will also occasionally eat smaller vertebrates as well if they can catch and subdue them. In captivity, these tarantulas can be fed a variety of appropriately sized feeder insects such as crickets, roaches, mealworms, superworms, and waxworms. Other feeders, such as pre-killed rodents of appropriate size and feeder anoles or house geckos can also be supplied on occasion, but are not required. 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

Goliath bird eating tarantulas are somewhat more of a semi aggressive species that is best suited for the intermediate to advanced arachnid enthusiast or other pet enthusiast. Younger spiders of this species can be more active and skittish, but older adult spiders can be calmer and be handled with more experienced care and handling. This species may assume a defensive posture when irritated, but also tends to be more likely to kick urticating hairs. Some level of care should be exercised nonetheless when handling this species due to their very large fangs. Although this is not a suggested beginner's tarantula, the Goliath bird eater is a large, attractive species that has seen popularity in the hobby and industry in addition to its large size. Tarantulas in general are fragile animals, and accidentally dropping a spider can result in the rupture of its internal organs and/or exoskeleton, causing death to your tarantula. Although most tarantulas are not medically significant, with most being lesser than or just about equal to a bee sting, medical attention should still be sought from any apparent allergic reaction to a bite, or extreme irritation from urticating hairs from a pet tarantula.

****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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