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House Centipedes (Scutigera spp.)

Leggy and Lively!

House centipedes belong to one of several species of cosmopolitan, small to medium sized centipedes, and are also sometimes known as the “hundred legged” centipedes. Indigenous to cool, damp microenvironments within the Mediterranean region, these many legged hitchhikers have found their way as stowaways to many other areas of the world throughout Asia, Europe, Australia, and North and South America. Typical coloration and morphology of these centipedes is a yellowish-gray, reddish, to brownish with several longitudinal rows of banding and/or striping on the body and legs. They have up to 15 pairs of long, delicate legs attached to their somewhat rigid bodies that allow them to very quickly run or scurry across floors, up walls, or across ceilings, and longer pairs of fore and hind legs to distort their appearances as a defensive form of automimicry. These long legs also give the centipedes much greater tactile and sensory capabilities of their surrounding environments. They also have compound, well faceted eyes able to better sense and distinguish prey items than most other centipedes. As with most other centipedes, however, they are able to capture and overpower their prey by administering venom through their forcipules, or modified stinger near their mouthparts. Although these centipedes can be startling to many due to their speed and appearance, they are harmless to humans and may in fact be beneficial houseguests in that they will consume other household pests while causing very little or no ecological or other adverse effects themselves. The most common and widespread species tend to be *Scutigera coleoptrata*.

Taxonomy

Life: All living, physical, and animate entities

Domain: Eukaryota

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Arthropoda

Subphylum: Myriapoda

Class: Chilopoda

Order: Scutigermorpha

Family: Scutigerae

Genus: Scutigera

**Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

Lifespan and Longevity

Captive and wild longevity for these house centipede species is uncertain, although under the proper care and conditions, can live for up to at least approximately 5 to 6 years or more.

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Distribution and Habitat

House centipedes are indigenous to the cool, dark, and damp microenvironments within the Mediterranean region, and may occur naturally in arid to semi-arid deserts, scrublands, savannahs, open forests and woodlands, and often in and around human habitations. They have also been widely dispersed throughout many other areas of the world as well, including North and South America, Europe, Australia, and Asia. A few other species and genera are also endemic to Australia as well.

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

Novice/Beginner to Intermediate/Moderate (depending on species).

Size

House centipedes are relatively small to medium sized centipedes, typically with a body length of roughly 0.98 to 1.38 inches in length, although their long legspans can give them the impression of being much larger, with legspan of up to 3 to 4 inches or slightly more.

Housing and Enclosure

Provide a sturdy and secure escape proof yet adequately ventilated enclosure, such as a 5 to 20 gallon tall terrarium or secure container for these 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 moderate to higher levels of humidity moderately well, and ample hides such as vertical and horizontal 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 of these 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

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overpower. As a captive diet, most feeder insects of appropriate size can be provided including crickets, roaches, mealworms, waxworms, roaches, superworms, and fruit flies. 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 handling is not recommended. House centipedes are capable of biting, or more technically "stinging", but possess a very mild venom, and bites, much less serious envenomations from this taxa of centipedes are rare. They are nonetheless fast moving, and should be handled with care to prevent injuring them. The appropriate tools applied in a gentle manner such as tongs, tweezers, and trap boxes or similar devices 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

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.

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