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Huntsman/Giant Crab Spiders *(Family Sparassidae)*

Widespread Wanderers

Huntsman spiders are a family of relatively large true spiders which have earned their name of “Huntsman” from their speed and predatory mode of hunting. They are also commonly known as the giant crab spiders after their appearance in which the first two pairs of legs are held outward in a similar fashion to crabs, as well as their quick scuttling means of locomotion. They are also occasionally known in other areas of the world as the wood spiders, rain spiders, or lizard eating spiders due to their habits of even capturing and consuming small vertebrates. More than 1,000 recognized species in over 40 genera are currently known, being found in most areas worldwide in Australia, Africa, Asia, the Mediterranean, and the Americas, and where they are well established in warm, tropical to sub-tropical areas of this range. These spiders are frequent wanderers, often being found in and around homes and other buildings, and have hitchhiked and become widely introduced in other areas of the world in which they are not indigenous to. These large spiders do not construct webs, but rather are active hunters of smaller insects, invertebrates, and even small vertebrates. Coloration for these species can also vary considerably, with most having various shades of brown and/or gray, although some can be more brightly or aposematically colored. For the more intermediate to advanced arachnid enthusiast, the huntsman spiders can make for simple and enjoyable large spider alternatives to the more commonly kept tarantulas.

Taxonomy

Life: All living, physical, and animate entities

Domain: Eukaryota

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Arthropoda

Subphylum: Chelicerata

Class: Arachnida

Order: Araneae

Infraorder: Araneomorphae

Family: Sparassidae

**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.

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Wandering 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 species, wandering spiders may be found in warm, tropical to sub-tropical environments most of worldwide in the Americas, Mediterranean region, Africa, Asia, and Australia. They are widespread hitchhikers, often being transported within ships, cargo, and by other means, and can occur or be transported to cooler or more temperate climates as well that do not become too cold year round. They are often found within and around warm, dark areas of homes, warehouses, basements, garages, and other buildings and human habitations. It is believed that most species are indigenous to southern to southeastern Asia, including India and Sri Lanka.

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 huntsman 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 in size or even larger. The largest species may be as large as 12 inches in legspan, making some members of this family of spiders among the largest of the true spiders.

Housing and Enclosure

Huntsman 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 5 to 10 gallon tall terrarium or enclosure with adequate holes for ventilation. These enclosures must be secure to prevent escape. 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, and height is just as important as floor space with these arboreal spiders. 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, but care should be taken to not over-mist.

Temperature, Lighting, and Humidity

Most species of huntsman 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 huntsman spiders are hardy species that do best at room temperature between 75 to 85 degrees.

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Maintain at 75 to 80% humidity. 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 animals can be given as well.

Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition

Insectivorous to Carnivorous; In the wild, Huntsman spiders are primarily insectivorous, meaning they eat insects and other invertebrates. They may even capture and consume prey as large as small amphibians, reptiles, and other small vertebrates. 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. 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

Most huntsman spiders tend to be skittish, defensive, 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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