



## Vampire Crabs (*Geosesarma* spp.)

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### **Vampire Look-Alikes**

Also known as the purple and yellow vampire crabs, carnival crabs, or panther crabs, vampire crabs belong to a genus of approximately 50 terrestrial to freshwater crab species inhabiting much of southern to southeastern Asia, depending on the species. Vampire crabs earn their names from their ghastly and goulash, yet colorful appearance, with yellowish, orangish, to reddish eyes. These crabs may be quite variable in color, with their carapaces ranging from bluish, purplish, to reddish or reddish-orange, and their pincers and limbs being paler or lighter colored blue, to reddish in color. Vampire crabs as a genus are terrestrial crabs that reproduce terrestrially or in freshwater independently from saline or saltwater conditions, and are primarily nocturnal to crepuscular scavengers, feeding and foraging on a variety of plant and animal material during dawn and dusk. Much remains to be known about these species' habits and distribution, and species appearing in the pet trade are uncertain as to their exact species. However, vampire crabs have recently become popular crabs to maintain in the pet trade over recent years.

### **Taxonomy**

**Life:** All living, physical, and animate entities

**Domain:** Eukaryota

**Kingdom:** Animalia

**Phylum:** Arthropoda

**Subphylum:** Crustacea

**Class:** Malacostraca

**Order:** Decapoda

**Infraorder:** Brachyura

**Family:** Sesarmidae

**Genus:** *Geosesarma*

**Species:** *Geosesarma* spp.\*

*\*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

### **Lifespan and Longevity**

Under the correct husbandry and care, vampire crabs can be expected to attain longevity of at least 2 to 3 years or more.

### **Distribution and Habitat**

Vampire crabs have a wide distribution depending on the species, and members of this genus of

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crabs can occur in freshwater, brackish water, to terrestrial coastal habitats from India in southern Asia, throughout southeastern Asia, through the Solomon Islands, and, in addition, Hawaii of the United States. Most specimens in the pet trade probably originate from the Sulawesi coast and surrounding areas. Within this range, these crabs may occupy a variety of habitats, from terrestrial, tropical to sub-tropical forests, to fresh water or brackish water bodies and wetlands, where they forage and occupy the forest floor leaf litter, vegetation, and other 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**

Novice/Beginner to Intermediate/Moderate.

### **Size**

Adult vampire crabs typically range from less than ½ an inch to about 1 ½ inches in carapace length. Their leg span reaches up to 2 ½ inches.

### **Housing and Enclosure**

Vampire crabs should be housed in a secure, sturdy, adequately ventilated terrarium, aquarium, or other enclosure. These crabs may be kept communally, meaning they are often found in groups, and multiple crabs can be housed together provided an adequately sized enclosure is accordingly provided, although males may fight. A 10 to 20 gallon or similar sized enclosure or larger depending on the number of crabs maintained is suitable. Crabs that are not provided adequate space may fight and possibly kill one another for resources. A substrate that enables these vampire crabs to dig and burrow, as well as maintain adequate humidity should also be provided. Sand substrates as well as peat or sphagnum moss, Java moss, or mixtures thereof can be used for added security and stimuli including driftwood, artificial foliage, and hides in the form of log or slab hides, rocks, clay flower pots, or other commercially designed hides and cage decor. These furnishings will provide these crabs with climbing, hiding, and perching opportunities.

### **Temperature, Lighting, and Humidity**

Adequate humidity is perhaps one of the most important factors for maintaining vampire crabs, which should be around 70%. Provide at least two large, shallow water dishes that the crabs can readily enter or exit or otherwise a 50 to 75% terrestrial to aquatic ratio setup or enclosure. A temperature gradient should also be provided in the enclosure, with around 70 to 85 degrees F for ambient and around 70 to 75 degrees F for water temperatures. Water pH levels should be maintained at around 7.5 to 8.5. Crabs that are exposed to direct sunlight or heat constantly may overheat. 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**

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***Detritivorous to Omnivorous***; In the wild, vampire crabs are omnivorous scavengers, feeding on small bits of organic plant and animal matter they are able to locate during foraging. In captivity, a varied, rotating diet for these crabs is recommended. A variety of fruit and vegetable matter will be eaten, as well as freeze dried plankton, krill, feeder crickets, mealworms, waxworms, superworms, redworms, earthworms, or shrimp. Some commercially available fish foods can also be given. An adequate calcium and vitamin D3 based diet and supplementation is also recommended for these crab's optimal 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**

Vampire crabs can be handled carefully, although they may pinch (which is not painful or dangerous). They can be allowed to walk on one's hands. Care should be taken to not drop them, however, since this can fracture their shell and/or cause internal injury to them.

**\*\*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](mailto:info@madisonherps.org)

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