

Babycurus gigas (Kraepelin, 1896)

by
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B.gigas adult male M.A.C.Cozijn © 2007

What's in a name?

This scorpion has no generally accepted common name yet. But names like 'giant Tanzanian bark or giant Tanzanian red bark scorpion' are not unimaginable.

Etymology: This is the largest species in the genus, more than likely the reason of the Latin name *gigas*, which can be translated as giant or gigantic.

Distribution

This scorpion is (uptill know) only known from Tanzania. One of the type localities is Tanga, which is a place near the shore in the North Eastern part of Tanzania, bordering Kenya. The other locality is an area called Usambara which is in the same corner of the country, but located to the North West of Tanga. The northern part of this area harbors the Usambara mountainrange. This distribution pattern suggests to me that it would be more likely to find this species in neighboring countries like Kenya, then in other countries, mainly because of various natural borders like Lake Victoria, Lake Tanganyika and Lake Nyasa and for instance the Rifiji river system in the South of Tanzania, near the border to Mozambique.



B.gigas (mating couple)

Spermatophore

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Natural habitat

There is much unknown about the natural habitat of this species. The Tanzanian landscape is dominated by savannahs with trees and is alternated by mountain ranges and lakes. It has a temperate tropical climate. The climate in the North Eastern part of Tanga is rather warm and humid and the average day temperature is around 29 Celsius (84 F), the average night temperature is around 22 Celsius (72 F). There are periods of significant rainfall (+ 114 mm per month) in the months March, April, May and October. In the Usambara area the climate is somewhat colder and less humid and the average night temperature can drop to 10 Celsius (50 F) in the mountains. It occurs in somewhat xeric as well as in mesic environments; it needs to have access to humidity like fog and/ or dew for its wellbeing. The scorpion hides most of day in their retreats under bark, stones and in the leaf litter. Like most scorpions they become more active at night.

Venom

Although this scorpion is from the family *Buthidae* (Koch, 1837), it is not considered a medical important species. But since it is a large sized buthid, one need to be careful with this species and should avoid getting stung. No sting reports or “hear-say” sting incidents are known to me at this moment. There is no data available on the LD50 value of the venom, I presume because it is considered not medically important.



B.gigas instar 4 M.A.C.Cozijn © 2007

Morphological information

Babycurus spp. look alike and are difficult to distinguish from one another, especially when young. In the case of *B.gigas*, the identification of adults is rather easy because it's considerable size of 89-110 mm (3,5-4,5 inches). *B.gigas* is the largest species in the genus. The pectinal teeth count of *B.gigas* is 19-24 for both sexes. Overall coloration of the carapace is lightbrown with darker areas near the edge of the carapace and the interocular region. The tergites are more yellowish to lightbrown in juveniles and more light to darkish brown in adults, with a horizontal elliptic shaped dark brown band (or more bands, mostly three, in juveniles) across the dorsal side of the mesosoma.

Both juveniles and adults bear a pattern of beautiful yellow vertical stripes across the mesosoma. The fingers of the pedipalps and chelicerae are blackish. The basitarsus and tarsus are darker than the other legsegments. The last two caudal segments (IV-V) are darker than the segments I-III. *B.gigas* has a darkened patella of the pedipalp, which distinguishes them from i.e. *B.jacksoni*). The moveable finger of the pedipalp shows ten rows of granules, the fixed finger shows nine rows of granules.

Males are distinguished from the females in this species, because of the males having a bigger manus of the pedipalps or more bulbous chela. Males also have less conspicuous keels (less granulate) on the fifth metasomal segment.



B.gigas subadult female M.A.C.Cozijn © 2007

Keeping in captivity

The latter of the following information is based on my own experience and that of a few other scorpionenthusiasts. Because this species is not yet commonly kept, reliable information about the ideal captive conditions is not readily available. This also counts for reliable information about localities. Some are occasionally imported with other scorpions (i.e. *B.jacksoni*) from Tanzania.

In my opinion the (absolute) minimum size for keeping of a pair of adults is around 30x20x20 cm (*12x 8x 8 inch*). I personally house my single adults in that size enclosure. I keep my specimens separate to avoid the risk of cannibalism. It is possible to keep adult specimens of this species in small groups, consisting of more females than males. I keep this species at a temperature of 24-28 Celsius (*75-82 F*) in the daytime and around 21 C (*70 F*) at night. The relative humidity should be around 70-75%, this can be done by keeping one half of the substrate totally dry (or maybe and occasional misting) and the other half moist (not wet to prevent mould or mites). In my opinion, *Babycurus gigas* in general needs to be kept slightly warmer and a bit moister than *B. jacksoni*.

I mist them well once a week or twice if necessary. At night they rest for longer periods of time lying in the moist area of the substrate. Humus alone is in my opinion ideal for substrate. Provide a small bottle cap or film roll cap for water, it is used for drinking and they need moisture to groom themselves. Provide sufficient ventilation to prevent the air going stale and to create a level of airflow.

This species breeds without much difficulty in captivity. Average litter size is 12-21. It takes roughly around 170 days until the females are able to reproduce. Females may reach adulthood after the fifth ecdysis (200-300 days) and males after the fourth (around 200 days) or fifth ecdysis (400-450 days). Longevity is around 3 years (*pers. com. F.Kovařik*). At this time I cannot give any information concerning the gestation period. Adults should be fed an appropriate sized prey once a week. In general I feed my scorpions crickets twice a week until they are passed the third instar. Prey is killed by a (couple of) quick sting(s), depending on the size of the prey item and on the size of the scorpion. I see multiple stings predominantly in younger specimens. Young are voracious predators which in some occasion

actively stalk their prey when detected. Females seem to have a more healthy appetite than the males, who eat more irregularly.

This species is in my opinion not suitable for beginning scorpionkeepers. It is an unpredictable species and can react very fast when it is startled or if there is some kind of disturbance. *B.gigas* is slightly more defensive than *B.jacksoni* and seems less reluctant to sting. When they are settled in the enclosure, they seem to become less nervous. They are known to play dead (*catalepsy*) when startled, especially younger specimens use this defense mechanism.

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