

Babycurus jacksoni (Pocock, 1890)



B.jacksoni subadult female M.A.C.Cozijn © 2006

What's in a name?

This scorpion has no generally accepted common name, but it is sometimes referred to as the red or Tanzanian (red) bark scorpion.

Etymology: The holotype (female) was found by F.J.Jackson in Taveita, Kenya near mount Kilimanjaro. The species is named after him.

Distribution

Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Cameroon and the Democratic Republic of Congo (Zaire).

Natural habitat

This species is found in savanna-type landscapes of Central and Eastern Africa. It lives and forages under bark, stones and in the ground litter. *Babycurus* species are known to climb trees to catch swarming termites. Although it occurs in drier habitats, it needs to have access to humidity for its wellbeing, it seems to take advantage of occasional dew or mist. This species will dig small scrapes under fallen logs or rocks to hide in.

Venom

Although this scorpion is from the family *Buthidae* (Koch, 1837), it is not considered a medically important species. But since it is a medium to large sized buthid, one needs to be careful with this species. Most reported victims (from the data available to me) from stings complained about localised pain, swelling and reddishness of the sting site. Severity of symptoms in these stings varied. The sting itself is painful. There is no data available (to me) on the LD50 value of the venom. The probable reason for this is that this species is not as well studied as other more dangerous buthids belonging to genera like *Androctonus*, *Leiurus* or *Tityus*.



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Morphological information

Species from the genus *Babycurus* look very much alike and are very difficult to identify and distinguish from one another, especially when they are not adult. The easiest to determine are adult males of the various species. The pectinal teeth number of *Babycurus jacksoni* is 18-24. *Babycurus jacksoni*'s overall coloration is orange to light brown, with a prominent triangular or elliptic shaped dark brown band (or bands) across the dorsal side of the mesosoma. The fingers of the pedipalps are black. The moveable finger of the pedipalp shows eight rows of granules, the fixed finger shows seven rows of granules. There is a pattern of spots or bands on the femur and patella of the pedipalps, legs and metasomal segments, that seem to get less obvious when the scorpions mature. The chelicerae are black as in many other species from the genus. *Babycurus jacksoni* varies in length from 6 to 9 cm (2,4 to 3,6 inches).

Males are easily distinguished from the females in this species, because the males have a bigger manus of the pedipalps or more bulbous pedipalps in more popular terms. The only exception in the whole genus is *B.centurimorphus*. In this species the males have longer pedipalps, like in *Tityus paraensis* or *Isometrus maculatus*. The keels on the metasomal segments three to five, are more obvious in males. This genus is related to the genus *Odonturus* (Karsch 1879), species in both genera look very much alike. *Babycurus* species only have tibial spurs on the last pair of legs, while *Odonturus* species have them on both legpairs three and four. There are currently 18 species in the genus *Babycurus*.

Babycurus jacksoni (adult male)



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Keeping in captivity

The latter of the following information is based on my own experience and the experience of a few other scorpionenthusiasts. The information displayed here works for me, but I do not exclude the possibility that there are other ways of maintaining this species.

In my opinion the minimum size for the keeping of a pair of adults is around 15x30x15 cm (12x6x6 inch). When they are housed in groups, bigger enclosures are needed and sufficient hides and “territories” should be provided for the individuals to prevent possible fights or even cannibalism. It is said that males seem to be more territorial than females. Some say you can only house them as sub-adults, others say only as adults. In my opinion it is safer to house them in a group when adult and in a group that consists of more females than males. They need a temperature from 22-28 Celsius (72-82 Fahrenheit) in the daytime and around 21 C (70 F) at night.

The relative humidity should be around 65-75%, this can be done by keeping one half of the substrate totally dry (or maybe an occasional misting) and the other half moist (not wet to prevent mould or mites). Humus alone is ideal for a substrate, but it can be mixed with other substrates like vermiculite. Provide a small bottle cap or filmroll cap for water, it is used for drinking and they need moisture for grooming themselves. Don't provide as much ventilation as with desert species, but enough to prevent the air going stale and to create a level of airflow.

This species breeds readily in captivity. Average litter size is 18-30. Feed young specimens two times a week and adults should be fed an appropriate sized prey once a week. Prey is killed by a (couple of) quick sting(s), depending on the size of the prey item. This species, in my opinion is 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. They are known to play dead very well. Young animals seem to do this more often than adults, probably as a defence mechanism. One moment it stays still, even when touched with a pair of tweezers, the other moment it has run to the other side of its enclosure. So it is not suitable for the novice keeper because it is fast moving, unpredictable and because it is a buthid and therefore more venomous than most species available from the pettrade. It is a suitable species for more experienced keepers who start to keep members of the family *Buthidae* (C.L.Koch, 1837).



Babycurus jacksoni 2nd instar M.A.C.Cozijn © 2006

Selected Literature

- Odchov štíra *Babycurus jacksoni* (Development of the scorpion *Babycurus jacksoni* in captivity). *Akva Tera Fórum* 1 (2):58-62 (In Czech with English summary); František Kovařík: 2005
- Description of three new species of scorpion from Sudan (Scorpiones: buthidae) Boletín Sociedad Entomológica Aragonesa, N 36 (2005):21-28. Wilson R. Lourenço.
- Revision of *Babycurus* with description of three new species (Scorpiones:buthidae) František Kovařík 2000;
- Catalog of the scorpions of the world Fet-Sissom-Lowe-Braunwalder New York Entomological Society 2000;
- Skorpione D.Mahsberg, R.Lippe and S.Kalles. Natur und Tierverlag 1999;
- Phylogenetic position and geographical distribution of the genus *Odonturus* Karsch 1879 (Scorpiones, Buthidae) Wilson R. Lourenço, Biogeographica 1998, 74 (1): 41-46.

