CARE GUIDE

MINIBEAST WILDLIFE

CROWNED STICK INSECT

Onchestus rentzi

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PROFILE

Crowned Stick Insects are found in the rainforest of north Queensland where they feed upon a variety of plants species. Unlike canopy dwelling stick insects, Crowned Stick Insects will often venture down low to the ground during the day and will shelter on and under logs, as well as sitting motionless within plant foliage.

They have a very interesting reproductive cycle, beginning with the eggs being tossed individually by females from the trees down to the forest floor. A single female may lay over 1000 eggs in a lifetime. The eggs look very much like plant seeds and are often collected by ants and stored below ground in their nests which protects the eggs from predators.

After hatching, the baby stick insects (nymphs) must make their way to the surface and into a tree. The nymphs are very delicate, brown and twig-like at this stage, and use their appearance to blend into the small growth at the tips of branches.

Once in a tree they begin to feed on leaves and grow by shedding their outer skeleton (exoskeleton). This process is called ecdysis or moulting. To moult successfully the insect needs to hang uninterrupted beneath a leaf or branch. This can take 10mins to half an hour. Both sexes are similar initially, but as they grow females develop into more robust insects and cannot fly. Males are more lightly built, have longer antennae and are able to make short flights.

An amazing fact about many phasmids is that they are parthenogenetic. This means that females don't need to be mated to reproduce. So if you only have a single female, she can still produce young - replicas of herself.

FOOD

Various species of Eucalyptus (gum), Acacia (wattle), Cadagi and Guava. Ensure fresh, healthy leaves are always available to your insect. Don't let the leaves dry out before you change them. The leaves should be put into a jar of water to keep them fresh for as long as possible. Make sure the jar has a lid or covering with holes in it to stop the young stick insects from falling in and drowning. The leaves should touch the top and sides of the enclosure. Offering two or three species of food plant when you first get your stick insects is a good way finding one that they like. Food plant should be changed over at least once a week.

WATER

Mist-spray the leaves around your insect once a day – it will drink the droplets.

ENCLOSURE

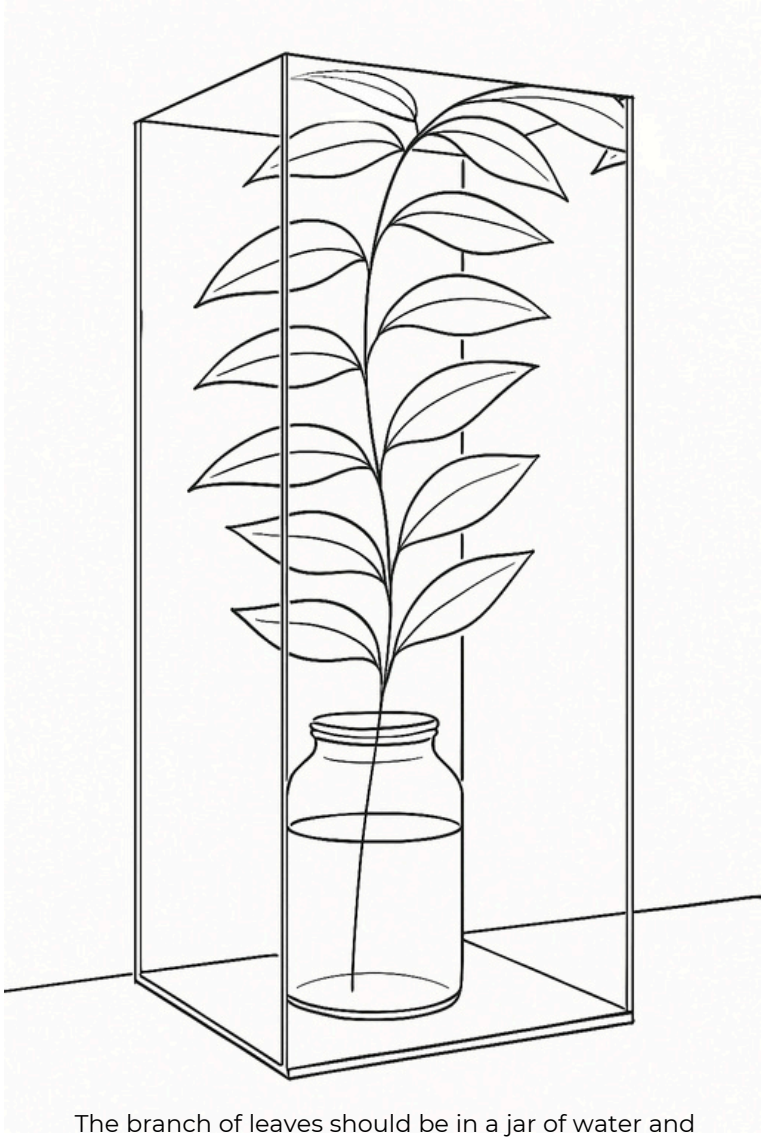
The enclosure needs to be large enough to allow your stick insect to shed its exoskeleton properly. Several individuals can be housed together as long as each insect has sufficient space to hang and feed without disturbing others. An enclosure should be higher than it is wide, as stick insects like to climb upwards. Minimum size requirements are 30cm high x 30cm wide x 30cm deep. Place the enclosure in a spot where it gets a bit of daylight each day, but be careful it doesn't overheat in direct sunlight. Make sure there is plenty of ventilation in your enclosure.

SUBSTRATE

Not required, but it can help with clean up to put some paper down on the bottom of the enclosure to catch the frass (poo) and leaf material that falls to the ground.

TEMPERATURE

This species will do very well at 22 – 26° C, but will tolerate 10 – 20° C and have a slower growth rate.



The branch of leaves should be in a jar of water and should reach the top and sides of the enclosure. Multiple branches can be used.

CLEANING AND MAINTENANCE

Remove frass (poo) and fallen leaf material from the bottom of the enclosure once a week. This can be done when the food plant is changed over. If you have adult females in the enclosure, collect any eggs present on the enclosure floor.

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HANDLING

They should be picked up gently, by coaxing them onto your hand. They always prefer to climb up, so use this to your advantage when picking them up and putting them back onto the leaves. They do have small hooks on their feet that they use to hang on with – these may tickle a little.

COMMON ISSUES

Sometimes stick insects will not shed their exoskeleton properly. This may be because there isn't enough room in the enclosure for them to do so, or that their environment is too dry and their new exoskeleton hardens before they can free themselves from the old one. They can also lose limbs through the moulting process if they aren't hanging correctly whilst moulting. They can regrow lost limbs at their next moult, but need at least two moults to regrow a limb to a usable size.

EGG INCUBATION

The adult female will lay start laying eggs around a month after she moults to maturity. She will flick these onto the floor of the enclosure, and may lay several a day. Her eggs can hatch even if she has not mated with a male. If her eggs are not fertilised, the offspring will all be female. If she has mated with a male, the offspring will be male and female. The eggs will take at least three months to hatch after they were laid, but may take longer. Put the eggs in a ventilated container (insect mesh is perfect). After around three months, put the eggs in some moist coco-peat, and keep the coco-peat damp. Once the eggs start to hatch, the hatchling stick insects will feed on soft foliage.

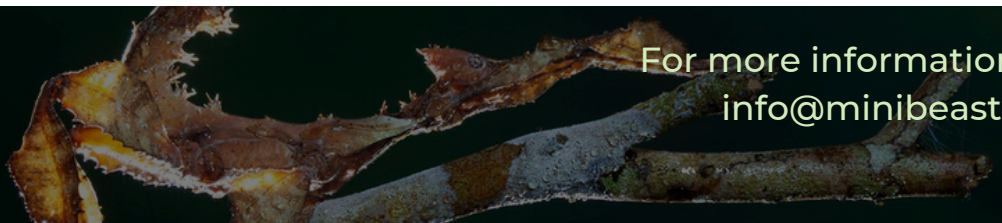
Around 1 year life span

These animals are captive bred, and should not be released into the wild

50-60%

Hatchling of the Crowned Stick Insect

Egg of the Crowned Stick Insect



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