CARE GUIDE

MINIBEAST WILDLIFE

GIANT NORTHERN STICK INSECT

Acrophylla wuelfingi

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PROFILE

Giant Northern Stick Insects are extremely large straight bodied insects, and are among Australia's longest species. They have an array of small knobs or spines on their thorax, and have large serrations on the upper legs. Like most phasmids, the females are much larger and more robust than the males, and can grow to a length of 210mm. Mature females have large fan-like wings which are used to startle predators, but cannot fly due to their body weight. Mature males are light-weight and can fly quite well.

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 hundreds of eggs in a lifetime. The eggs are matte black and look very much like plant seeds. They 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 green and slender 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 10 minutes to half an hour. Both sexes change from bright green to olive brown as they approach maturity, although individuals may go through various multi-coloured combinations along the way.
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

Eucalyptus species (gum), *Acacia species* (wattle), *Corymbia torelliana* (Cadagi), *Syzygium australe* (Lilly Pilly / Brush Cherry) and *Psidium guajava* (Guava). Ensure fresh, healthy leaves are always available to your insect. **Don't let the leaves dry out before you change them. The stems should be put into a jar of water to keep them fresh.** 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 of finding one that they like. Food plant should be changed over at least once a week.

WATER

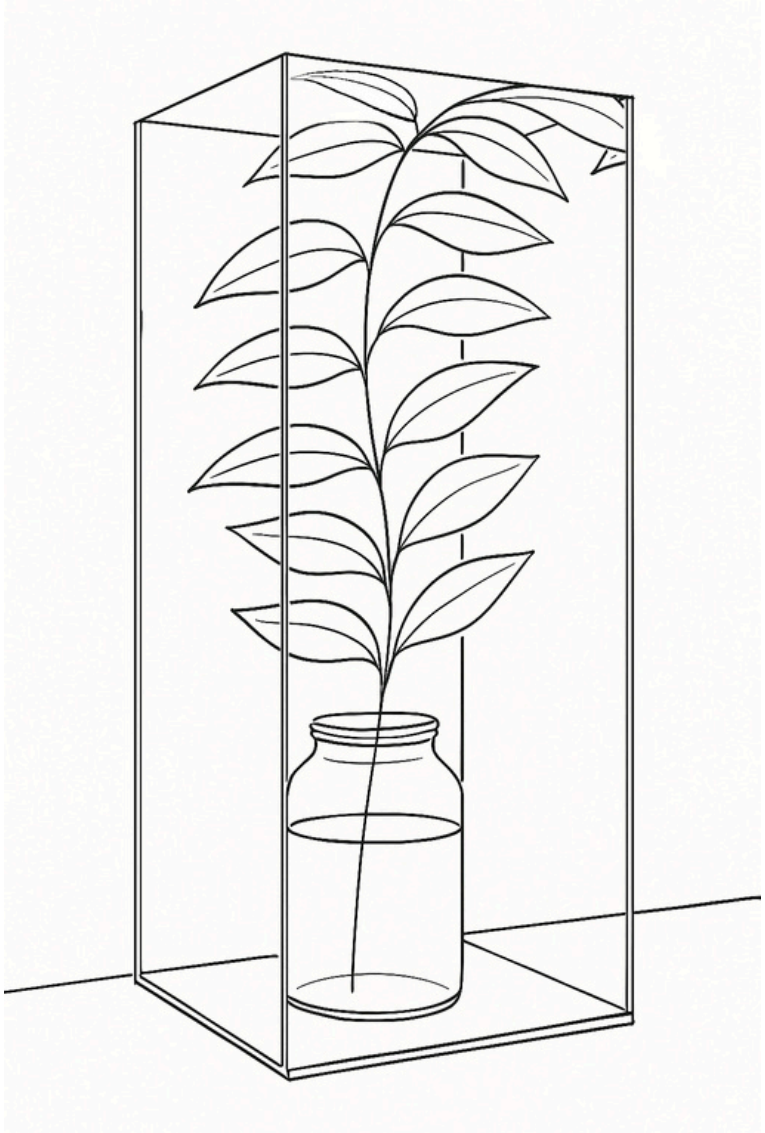
Mist-spray the leaves around your insect once a day – it will drink the droplets.

ENCLOSURE

The enclosure needs to be large enough to allow your stick insect to shed its exoskeleton properly. An enclosure at least 50cm H x 30cm W x 30cm D is recommended. A number of individuals can be housed together as long as each insect has sufficient space to hang and feed without disturbing others. The enclosure should be higher than it is wide, as stick insects like to climb upwards. 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.

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 are not 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.



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 may 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 your hand a little.

TEMPERATURE

This species will do best at 22 – 28° C, but will tolerate 18 – 20° C and have a slower growth rate.

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.

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.

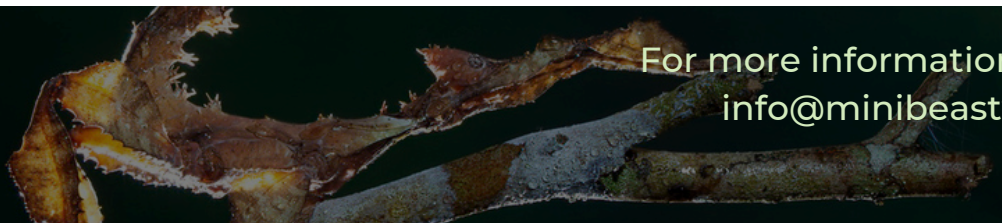
12 - 16 months life span

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

50-60%

Hatchling of the Giant Northern Stick Insect

Egg of the Giant Northern Stick Insect



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