

Curly Hair Tarantula *Brachypelma albopilosum*

Nocturnal Predators

Curly hair tarantulas are nocturnal hunters that lie in wait for prey in their burrows. The sensitive hairs on their legs pick up vibrations that detect prey as it approaches. The spiders rapidly dart out of the burrow to seize passing prey. Holding the prey with their pedipalps they inject powerful venom. The venom serves two purposes – first paralyzing the prey and then beginning digestion. Tarantulas have narrow mouths so they cannot ingest pieces of food. Once the venom has liquefied the prey, the tarantula sucks up the proteins and fats of the prey item leaving behind a small pile of undigested body parts.

Spider Shed

Tarantulas have an external skeleton or exoskeleton that is different from the internal bony skeleton of humans. The exoskeleton is hard and inflexible so it cannot accommodate a growing spider. Tarantulas must periodically molt discarding their old exoskeleton and growing a new exoskeleton as they get bigger.

Classification

Class: Arachnida
Order: Araneae
Family: Theraphosidae
Genus: Brachypelma
Species: albopilosum

Distribution

Honduras, Nicaragua and northeastern Costa Rica

Habitat

Tropical rainforest regions, either around the base of large trees, near rivers or in patches of cleared rainforest.

Physical Description

- Curly hair tarantulas are up to 2.8 inches (6-7 cm) long.
- They have a leg span up to 5.8 inches (14.5 cm) long.
- Their body and legs are covered with dark brown bristly hairs and longer golden hairs.
- Males are lighter in color than females
- They have eight legs plus two fang tipped appendages and two chelicerae in front near the mouth.
- They have a hard exoskeleton that is molted as they grow.

Diet

What Does It Eat?

In the wild: Insects, small vertebrates

At the zoo: ??

What Eats It?

Social Organization

Tarantulas are solitary except when mating.

Life Cycle

Female curly hair tarantulas are mature at three to four years of age and males slightly younger. Unreceptive females are aggressive to approaching males and may try to kill and eat them. A receptive female will allow a male to mate, passing a packet of sperm to the female using his pedipalps or legs. The resulting fertilized egg sac is the size of a golf ball and contains 500-1000 eggs. The female lays the egg sac in a burrow where it is incubated for seven to eight weeks before the pale colored spiderlings emerge. The tiny young spiders are the size of a pencil point and stay in the burrow developing quickly for a couple of weeks. After their first molt they disperse to find food, make their own burrows and live independently. Male curly hair tarantulas may live nine to 10 years and females up to 20 years.

Adaptations

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Legs, Legs and More Legs

Like all spiders, tarantulas have eight legs. Curly hair tarantulas have sensitive hairs on their legs to detect vibrations of passing prey or potential predators. They also have four other appendages near their mouth. They have two leglike pedipalps used to hold and carry prey items, transport eggs or dig burrows. They also have two fang-tipped appendages called chelicerae that strike in a downward motion to inject venom.

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Conservation Connection

Curly hair tarantulas are listed on Appendix II of CITES. This rainforest inhabitant is threatened by habitat loss. Once captured in large numbers for the pet trade, now they can only be traded internationally according to quotas and trade permits. Tarantulas sold as pets are bred in captivity and not taken from the wild.

Fun Facts

- Curly hair tarantulas are named for the light tan or orange hairs covering their body and legs. The hairs have a distinctive curl – giving them the appearance of a tarantula with a perm!
- Tarantulas are solitary and do not usually tolerate others of the same species.
- They can spin webs but use the web material to line their burrows.
- Most tarantula bites are not harmful to humans – equivalent to a bee sting - but their fangs can produce painful puncture wounds.
- When threatened, tarantulas display their fangs.
- Curly hair tarantulas are generally docile but can move quite fast.
- They have simple eyes that detect variations in light.