

**CONCISE CARE SHEETS**

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**S O C O T R A I S L A N D  
B L U E T A R A N T U L A**



**INTRO**

*Monocentropus balfouri* is one of the most popular, beautiful and interesting tarantulas in the hobby. Its color certainly is something to marvel at, but it is its social behavior that is truly remarkable. This is a communal species and young can be raised to adulthood with their mother. Young will crowd around their mother's chelicerae (jaws) and mouth while she is feeding and ingest bits of her macerated prey to feed. In fact, it is recommended to leave young with mother at least until they have molted a few times and release prey of appropriate size for both young and adult female into the cage at feeding times.

Commonly called the Socotra Island Blue Baboon Tarantula, this vernacular name of *Monocentropus balfouri* is derived from its home on Socotra Island, which lies off the coasts of Yemen and Somalia in the Arabian Sea near the mouth of the Gulf of Aden. The term "baboon tarantula" is applied to all tarantula spiders of African and Arabian origin. It is derived from the resemblance of their legs to the fingers of baboons, at least to tribesmen who have observed their legs in the mouths of their burrows.

**GENERAL CARE & ENVIRONMENT**

*Monocentropus balfouri* is an obligate burrower that creates a burrow often with several entrances that become heavily covered in silk. An inhabitant of scrub desert, its terrarium can be kept fairly dry but somewhat moist and tamped down substrate is best when creating a new habitat. This will allow the spider to dig a structurally sound burrow or network of tunnels.

As with most tarantulas, warm room temperatures in the 70-80°F range are adequate, temperatures exceeding 82°F should be avoided, and a nighttime drop to cooler temperature is tolerated.

Spiderling Socotra Island Blue Tarantulas are best raised with their mothers, but if you purchase spiderlings that have been housed individually they are best kept in a 24 oz. deli cup that half filled with substrate. Juveniles may be housed in small plastic terrariums and adults can be kept in glass terrariums or storage boxes with approximately 1-2 square feet of floor space.

**HOUSING**

Spiderling *Monocentropus balfouri* that have been kept individually can be established in 24 oz. deli cups with "fruit fly" lids. These containers are about 4.5" tall and just over 4" in diameter. It is best to fill them 1/2-2/3 with firmly packed substrate to allow the spider to burrow. Once the young tarantulas outgrow the deli cup they may be housed similarly in clear plastic storage containers or critter keeper style small enclosures.

Adult Socotra Island Blue Baboon Tarantulas are moderately sized spiders and nothing larger than a ten gallon aquarium or a modern glass terrarium of similar dimensions is required. Greater floorspace will, however, allow for providing a couple of retreats and facilitate the network of tunnels some *M. balfouri* will create.

Coconut coir is perhaps the best tarantula substrate and may be purchased loose or in compressed bricks that require soaking in water for expansion. The latter is used by most keepers as using the correct ratio of water to coir (generally 3 quarts per brick) results in perfectly moist substrate once it is mixed and allowed to dry a bit over an hour or so.

As mentioned above, the ideal enclosure has six-ten inches of substrate to allow for natural burrowing. The subterranean microenvironment of the burrow provides comfort and safety. However, display specimens may be kept on several inches of substrate provided that they are offered

**QUICK TIPS**

- » 72-80°F with a drop in temperature at night (65-70°F) ideal but not necessary.
- » Requires 40-60% humidity, but also good ventilation.
- » Eats arthropods and small vertebrates and thrives on roaches or crickets in captivity.

be controlled by a rheostat or other terrarium thermostat for both home and spider safety.

Functional decorations may include hollow logs, half-log small animal hiding places, cork slabs or tubes. Any of these will help establish secure retreats. Live foliage is good for both natural humidity and gas exchange, but most keepers either keep spartan enclosures or instead use artificial plants for both beauty and cover. Live plants suited for low light situations are best as tarantulas are nocturnal and secretive and only subdued lighting is recommended. For larger planted terrariums requiring direct fluorescent lighting a shaded area should be created with numerous hides that offer darkness.



*Monocentropus balfouri*

**FOOD & WATER**

*Monocentropus balfouri* will feed on a variety of arthropods. Crickets are fine for young specimens, but 4 -6 jumbo crickets would be required to make a meal for an adult. Most keepers instead use tropical roaches for adults. Active roaches like *Blaberus discoidalis* are preferred to burrowers like *Blaptica dubia* that will hide, but the latter can be offered from rubber-tipped forceps or dropped directly into the spider's retreat. A weekly meal is sufficient. Water is mostly obtained from the food. A

water bowl would only be used in dire emergency and is only suggested for adults, but is a good safety net.

**SHEDDING**

Adult tarantulas molt their skins approximately once a year, but young growing spiders will do so much more often based on food intake. When the abdomen becomes fully expanded the spider will cease feeding and will become dark and have a dull shininess. At this point more frequent misting is advisable to elevate humidity and ensure no troubles during ecdysis (exoskeleton sloughing).

**HANDLING**

Tarantulas are delicate invertebrates that may be fatally injured by a fall. They are hands-off terrarium pets best left alone. Our recommendation is to not handle tarantulas at all. The well-known spider trapping technique using cup and a piece of cardboard to slide between surface and cup to cover the opening may be used to trap them safely to move them to a new enclosure.

**ADDITIONAL INFO**

Michael Jacobi, former NW Zoo General Manager, is the author of Animal Planet's *Tarantulas*. This concise primer on tarantula keeping is an excellent resource and contains none of the misinformation found in the most popular tarantula books released by Barron's. Additionally, NW Zoo also owns [Tarantulas.com](http://Tarantulas.com) and there is care information to be found there.