



CONCISE CARE SHEETS

find more caresheets at nwzoo.com/care

B A B O O N S P I D E R S
A F R I C A N T E R R E S T R I A L S

INTRO

The term "baboon spider" is synonymous with "tarantula" and is generally applied only to all species that inhabit Africa. The name is derived from the continent's familiar monkeys, and is a reference to the similarity in appearance of baboon fingers and the legs of the native tarantulas when seen inside their burrows. But "baboon spider" is used for all African tarantulas, including a couple species that inhabit trees.

Baboon spiders are found in forest, grassland and desert regions, but reach their greatest diversity in the arid savannahs of southern Africa. By far the most distinctive genus is *Ceratogyrus*, which are known as "horned baboon spiders" due to the foveal protuberance or "horn" that many species have on top of the carapace. The largest species is the King Baboon (*Pelinobius muticus*), long known as 'Citharischius crawshayi', but the *Hysteroocrates* species of tropical central and western Africa are also some of the world's largest spiders. The medium-sized species are well represented by the wide-ranging genus *Pterinochilus* as well as *Ceratogyrus*, while *Heterothele* baboon spiders are very small and *Heteroscodra* and *Stromatopelma* live in West African trees.

CAPTIVE CARE

To generalize we will look at *Ceratogyrus* and *Pterinochilus*, both of which are obligate burrowers that create burrows in a variety of habitats and incorporate a fair amount of silk in retreat construction. For both genera, and also the related *Augacephalus*, the majority of species inhabit arid savannah and scrubland where they dig burrows into the earth. Ground litter and debris such as leaves and grasses are often incorporated into the burrow mouth using silk, and this may create a turret that rises above ground level. Dry oak leaves or decorative green moss placed in the terrarium of captive specimens will allow the spiders to create interesting retreats where they will feel secure.

Baboon spiders will adapt to terrariums that offer hiding places such as half-logs and concave cork bark placed on several inches of soil, but thrive when given the opportunity to create their own burrows in deeper substrate. This is particularly true of species from more tropical areas such as forests (e.g. *Hysteroocrates*).

HOUSING

These are terrestrial spiders that do well in glass terrariums and are often kept in plastic storage tubs converted to tarantula housing by adding air holes that are drilled in the side. To provide sufficient ventilation we like to make a few larger holes in the ends and sides of these plastic boxes by using a 1-2" diameter hole saw to make "windows", which are then covered from the inside by insect mesh screening that is cut to a diameter an inch or so larger than the hole and then affixed to the inside of the container using hot glue.

Substrate can be slightly moist coconut fiber, peat moss or an equal mix of peat moss and play sand. As mentioned above, dry oak leaves, terrarium or sphagnum moss or other leaf litter can be placed on top of several inches of substrate to create ground cover that the tarantula will incorporate into its retreat. Breeders prefer to provide a good depth of substrate so that tarantulas can create their own natural burrows, but pet keepers that prefer to be able to see their spiders more often may choose to provide a half-log, half a cork bark tube or some other concave hiding place where the tarantula will create its retreat.

A small shallow bowl of fresh water is recommended, and a rock or two placed inside will help prevent crickets or other prey from drowning. Do not use sponge, cricket getl or anything else that will become fouled and promote unsanitary conditions as a water source.

FOREST SPECIES

Both some of the largest and smallest baboon spiders inhabit tropical forests and require more moisture than the majority of African tarantulas. *Hysteroocrates* species are native to both forests and grasslands in equatorial West Africa and nearby central Africa. These huge spiders can be housed as described above, but more care should be taken in ensuring that part of their enclosure is a bit damper and retains humidity. They are

QUICK TIPS

- » 72-78°F with a drop in temperature at night (72-75°F)
- » Requires 50-70% humidity, but also good ventilation.
- » Baboon spiders can be quite defensive and can inflict painful bites. Exercise caution when caring for these tarantulas.

best kept with deeper substrate.

Heterothele are very small African tarantulas that have long spinnerets and use a great deal of silk to create tunnels among leaf litter and small burrows. They do well in small terrariums or plastic boxes, but ventilation holes will have to be small to prevent escape.

THE KING BABOON

We have a species-specific care sheet dedicated to this largest of African tarantulas, *Pelinobius muticus*. Please refer to it for detailed information on the care of this amazing tarantula with huge rear legs. This spider creates an incredible "hissing" defensive sound using stridulation (rubbing specialized body surfaces together). As we note in our King Baboon care sheet, this species creates amazing burrows for its retreat and we like to keep them in taller enclosures usually used for tree-dwelling spiders to provide very deep substrate and the opportunity to view them in their fascinating tunnels.

OTHER BABOON SPIDERS

NW Zoological also has a species-specific care sheet dedicated to the Blue Baboon Spider (*Monocentropus balfouri*) of Socotra Island off the coast of northeastern Africa. It contains information about this fascinating communal tarantula. Other popular baboon spiders belong to the genus *Harpactira*. These spiders require similar care to other southern African genera like *Augacephalus* and *Ceratogyrus*. They too are burrowers that inhabit arid scrub, grassland and desert, and should be kept in relatively dry enclosures with a damp area and plenty of leaf litter they will include in their retreats. The Blue-footed Baboon (*Idiothele mira*) is a particularly interesting African tarantula. It creates a burrow with a trapdoor lid! As unsuspecting prey crosses near its retreat, it quickly rushes forward and pulls it into its lair. Sometimes when it is hungry this spider's blue "toes" can be seen slightly lifting the lid in preparation for the hunt.

Two arboreal baboon spiders are popular with tarantula keepers. *Heteroscodra maculata* and *Stromatopelma calceatum* inhabit the trees of West African forests. Their care is very similar to that of the Ornamental Tarantulas of India and Sri Lanka (*Poecilotheria* species). We ask you to use our **Ornamental Tarantula Care Overview** care sheet as well as our special 4-page guide to **ARBOREAL TARANTULA CARE & HOUSING** to learn about caring for these species.

BLUE-FOOTED BABOON SPIDER

