Portsmouth Reptile & Amphibian Society
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P.R.A.S Care sheet No 14

Species Common Name: **Emperor Scorpion**

Scientific Name: *Pandinus imperator*

Care Difficulty:
Good invertebrates for beginners. Hardy in captivity and considered fairly harmless, as they are not naturally aggressive and the sting has a low potency. Care should be taken if the owner is allergic to bee or wasp stings.

Distribution:
The Emperor scorpion is native to Africa. Most adult specimens that are seen in the pet trade are imported from North Africa especially Egypt. They are readily bred in captivity and sold as juveniles about 3 cm long. If you wish to know the origin of your animal ask the person who is selling it to you as it is very difficult to distinguish wild caught from captive bred. Both do equally well in captivity.

Description:
The common emperor scorpion is very large, heavily built species, typically described as the world's largest scorpion. The overall colour is usually glossy black, but some may be dark brown and occasionally a greenish hue. The pedipalp chelas or "pincers" may have a reddish-brown hue, and are very granular in texture. There are numerous, clearly visible sensory "hairs" on the pedipalp, metasoma and telson. Males can be distinguished from females by the length of the pectines. The pectines (ventral comb-like structures just behind the fourth pair of legs) of the male are clearly longer. If you are new to keeping scorpions, you will need to have both sexes present to compare them and determine which are males or females.

Size:
These scorpions can grow up to 15–20 cm (6-8").

Housing:

The natural habitat for scorpions is somewhere under rocks and bark during the day, and scurrying across the soil at night. They therefore need an area to dig a damp burrow and drier areas to come out at night. The ideal set up for two scorpions would be a 90x45x30cm (35x18x12") glass tank. The height of the tank must be at least 3 times the length of the animal plus decoration must be at least 15cm (6") from the top of the tank. This is because scorpions are expert climbers and will grab with their pincers and haul themselves out. A secure lid is recommended, and ventilation must be provided. Piercing holes in the lid or cutting out a small area and replacing it with fine mesh can achieve this. The best substrate is a 60:40 mixture of peat to vermiculite. This should be at a depth of twice the length of the scorpion so it can dig a safe burrow. The mixture should then be saturated with water. The top should then be covered with 3–4cm (1-2") of bark chippings. The substrate should be sprayed on a regular basis. To maintain a moist under layer and not saturating the top layer a small piece of hollow bamboo or even a ball pen outer case can be pushed into the peat mixture and water poured down the tube, this allows the top to stay dry.

Decoration can be simple, such as rocks and bark. Scorpions are nocturnal and do not need to bask. A red light can be used to view them at night. The ideal temperature for these animals is 27°C (80°F). Under tank heating is the best. A thermal gradient must be provided so as not to over heat the scorpion. This can be done by placing a heat mat under a third of the bottom of the tank. In hot weather this may be turned off completely. A thermostat could also be used to regulate the temperature of the vivarium.

Diet and Feeding:
In captivity scorpions mainly eat crickets and locusts. 3mm crickets for babies and bigger ones for older animals. Adults will also eat baby mice. Feed two of three crickets a week. Cold and pregnant scorpions will not feed. Water can be provided on damped cotton wool if desired. The damp burrow should be adequate for hydration though.

Breeding:
Emperor scorpions do breed regularly in captivity. Females kept on their own can also appear to produce young without mating, how ever they have mated, often in the wild and retained the sperm often for over two years. Scorpions are very interesting to watch perform a mating ritual. Scorpions have a pair of unique sensory organs called pectines. They are between the body/leg joint of the third and fourth legs. They look like a set of short combs. The male tend to have slightly larger teeth and more teeth on the combs. Between the combs is a small lobe this plate covers the genital region. When beginning the mating ritual the male will take the pedipalp of the female in his and walk 'hand in hand' with the pectines sporadically touching the ground, to find a good mating spot. Once found the male releases a jelly like droplet of sperm on to the ground, he then guides the female over it until she can pick it up into her genital region so completing fertilization. From a minimum of two months to over two years (4 months is about average) the female starts to show obvious swelling showing the membranes under the armoured segments. The female gives birth to live young. From ten to thirty in number is quite normal. They are small white miniatures of the female. As quickly as they can they

climb up onto the mothers back. For the first week they will not feed as they sit there and absorb the yolk sac within themselves. The mother will tend not to eat the young at this nymph stage and will readily defend them from predators including YOU! So be careful. After their first moult the babies become a beige colour. They will still ride on the mothers back. When she feeds she will often cut up bits of prey for the young. After a few weeks the babies disperse to find their own burrows. Any that stay too long may get eaten! It is a good idea to transfer the young at this stage to another tank.
