



Portsmouth Reptile & Amphibian Society

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P.R.A.S Care sheet no. 18



**Species Common Name:** **Indian stick insect**

**Scientific Name:** *Carausius morosus*

**Care Difficulty:**

Good invertebrates for beginners. A good choice for children, the insects live for about a year, often the length of a child's interest in a pet!

**Distribution:**

The Indian Stick insect is found in the Tamil region of Southern India.

**Description:**

Stick insects used to be grouped in with grasshoppers, crickets, roaches and mantises in the order Orthoptera until they were placed in their own order. Like many of the mantises, stick insects are masters of disguise. Blending in perfectly, these plant eating insects look and move like the foliage they inhabit. This species is usually parthenogenetic. They are stick-like, medium sized wingless insects with medium length antennae. Colour various shades of dull green or brown, sometimes with darker mottling. In adult females the inside base of the forelegs are bright red. The thorax has a number of small tubercles (knobs). The thinner, shorter males are brown. It is believed that those reared in captivity are genetic females with male characteristics, but sterile, which are more frequent when these insects are kept at unusually high temperatures.

**Size:**

Male: (very rare 48.5-61mm - thinner than female - not needed for reproduction - about 1 in every 10,000 are male and almost certainly infertile). Female: 70-84mm

**Housing:**

The vivarium must be tall enough for the stick insect to hang down and moult its skin, at

least three times the length of the adult is recommended. Something in the region of 60x30x30cm (24x12x12") is adequate for one or two insects. More room is required for more insects, because if they are kept in close proximity they will attack each other's legs. The enclosure must be light and airy. There needs to be plenty of air circulation yet capable of maintaining a reasonable amount of humidity to mimic a tropical forest climate. For example the vivarium could be constructed of Perspex with small holes drilled in to the sides, or glass with mesh or net covered ventilation holes. Temperature should be maintained at 16-24°C (60-75°F). Heating is best provided by background temperature in the room or can be achieved by attaching a 'spider mat' to the back or side of the enclosure, or placing the vivarium on top of an already heated snake/lizard tank and take advantage of the rising heat. Substrate ideally for the tank should be pale to allow you to see any eggs. Paper or kitchen towel is a good choice.

### **Diet and Feeding:**

Indian stick insects will eat bramble leaves although they will eat leaves off the *Rubus* family of plants such as raspberry and Logan berries, plus privet and ivy. To ensure the greenery is fresh for longer place the bramble/privet stems in a glass of water. Place cotton wool or tissue around the top of the glass to form a plug so that the stick insects cannot climb down into the water and drown. Stick insects like to drink regularly. This species of stick insects drink best if the leaves in the tank are sprayed on a daily basis. If using tap water it can be highly chlorinated or fluorinated, it is a good idea to allow it to stand and 'mature' to allow these chemicals to break down before spraying. Mineral and vitamin supplements are not necessary.

### **Breeding:**

Most stick insects must be kept in pairs in order to breed, however the Indian stick insects are parthenogenetic, which means that the females will produce fertilised eggs without mating which will produce females. Males do exist, but sexual mating only produces males. Mature females lay several eggs each day, which accumulates to several hundred in its yearlong life span. Females drop their eggs to the ground. The eggs are round, brown with a yellow knob. When eggs are spotted on the paper substrate they can be removed and transferred into a box with sand or vermiculite substrate and maintained at the same temperature as the adults' environment. An occasional mist with water maintains necessary moisture. The eggs hatch into fragile-looking brown nymphs after about 1-2 months. These moult six times, taking about 4-7 months to mature; Female Indian Stick insects will grow up to 11cm (2.3"). Males are smaller, and very rare.

### **Handling:**

When first approached whilst on a leaf, often the stick insect will fall to the ground and feign death and pretend to be a twig. It will lay motionless for minutes. Both the Indian and the Pink winged insect are generally placid, and accept handling. The Pink wing can, when distressed spray an irritant from its rear end, though this is quite rare if they are handled gently. Never pick a stick insect up by the legs, as they may fall off!