

Heteroscodra maculata - Togo Starburst baboon tarantula

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Photo provided by: Chadwick family inverts on instagram

Heteroscodra maculata, commonly known as the Togo Starburst tarantula, is an eye-catching arachnid native to Ghana. Recognized for its vivid markings and dynamic behaviour, this species holds a special appeal for experienced keepers. However, Heteroscodra maculata is highly defensive and can deliver a painful bite which has medically significant venom, which makes handling strictly inadvisable to ensure the safety of both the keeper and the animal.

A key aspect of caring for Heteroscodra maculata is establishing an enclosure that mirrors its natural environment. In the wild, this tarantula inhabits warm regions where it utilizes elevated retreats among arboreal structures and shaded areas created by foliage. In captivity, a secure enclosure with dimensions of approximately 30cm x 30cm x 30cm is advised for an adult specimen. Such a space offers sufficient room for the tarantula to engage in its natural behaviours, including climbing and constructing its characteristic, heavily webbed retreats. A secure lid coupled with excellent ventilation is essential to prevent overheating while maintaining a stable environment.

The substrate is a fundamental component in simulating the native conditions of Heteroscodra maculata. A blend of coconut fibre or peat moss mixed with sand serves as an ideal base, providing a natural tactile surface and accommodating mild burrowing at the base of the enclosure. It is important to note that heavy décor items such as rock formations are best avoided; not only do they restrict the tarantula's arboreal activities, but they can also pose a danger risk to the animal by potentially causing injury during sudden movements or falls.

Instead of rock formations, emphasis should be placed on incorporating elements that promote climbing and retreat building. Cork bark tubes are an excellent addition, offering ideal hollows for the tarantula to hide, explore, and decorate with its silk. These tubes encourage the species' natural tendencies to construct elaborate, elevated retreats and contribute to an environment that aligns closely with its arboreal lifestyle.

Temperature regulation is another critical aspect of proper husbandry. *Heteroscodra maculata* thrives in ambient temperatures ranging from 22°C to 26°C. Rather than using heat lamps—which may provide uneven heat distribution—a regulated heating pad positioned under one section of the enclosure is preferred. This setup creates a controlled, evenly distributed warmth and establishes a thermal gradient, allowing the tarantula to move to cooler zones as needed for effective thermoregulation.

Humidity is equally important for the tarantula's well-being. Although *Heteroscodra maculata* originates from regions that might appear dry, it benefits from an ambient humidity level between 70% and 80%. These humidity parameters support overall vitality and facilitate a smooth moulting process. Proper ventilation, minimal misting, and the inclusion of a shallow water dish (which should be cleaned with regular frequency) can help maintain these levels without encouraging mould growth or respiratory complications.

Feeding in captivity is centred around live prey. Insects such as crickets and cockroaches, appropriately sized to match the tarantula's body, are suitable options. Feed the tarantula once or twice a week, ensuring that any uneaten prey is removed promptly to maintain cleanliness and reduce stress.

Regular observation of the tarantula, particularly during vulnerable periods such as moulting, is essential. With careful attention to creating an arboreal-friendly enclosure free of hazardous rock formations, maintaining optimal temperature and humidity, and providing a balanced diet, *Heteroscodra maculata* can thrive in captivity while ensuring both the animal's well-being and the caretaker's safety.

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