



CONCISE CARE SHEETS

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EARTH TIGERS
ASIAN TERRESTRIALS

INTRO

Asian tarantulas that live on the ground, usually in deep burrows they construct in the forest floor, are popularly known as "Earth Tigers". This collective name for tarantulas belonging to the subfamily Ornithoconinae refers both to their terrestrial habits, living in holes in the earth, and to the tiger-striped pattern of chevrons found on the abdomen of many species. However, it is a name that can lead to confusion. For example, the popular hobby tarantula known as the "Malaysian Earth Tiger" is actually an arboreal, or tree-dwelling, tarantula. And many varieties, including most of the species of *Chilobrachys*, do not have patterned abdomens at all. In this care sheet we will use the term "earth tiger" to refer to any Southeast Asian terrestrial or burrowing tarantula and, thereby, include spiders from the genus *Haplopelma* like the infamous Cobalt Blue (*Haplopelma* [or *Cyriopagopus*] *lividum*), as well as its cousins in the genera *Chilobrachys*, *Cyriopagopus* (recently a synonym of *Haplopelma*), *Ornithoconus* and other members of the subfamily Ornithoconinae. In fact, there are a number of new tarantulas in the hobby that have not been identified to genus level or described by science that are simply known as Ornithoconinae sp., with a geographical reference added such as Ornithoconinae sp.

Although the name "earth tiger" is best limited to members of the subfamily Ornithoconinae, the care recommendations contained herein would also apply to the terrestrial members of the Asian subfamily Selenocosmiae.

This broad collection of tarantulas varies widely in size and appearance, but, in general, can be characterized by a defensive attitude and inhabiting burrows dug deep into the ground, often in tropical forests. In some species the burrow mouths are turreted to protect them from rushing water and other hazards, and in most species the mouths of the burrows are heavily lined with silk and covered by a silken layer during the day to keep out pests and predators.

CAPTIVE CARE

To generalize we will look at the well-known Cobalt Blue and apply its care and housing to other earth tigers. The Cobalt Blue has been a mainstay of the tarantula hobby for at least two decades, after being described as a species by science in 1996. *Haplopelma* [*Cyriopagopus*] *lividum* inhabits tropical forests in Myanmar [Burma] and Thailand, with the pet trade specimens originating in Thailand. It lives in deep burrows of its own construction, either in the forest floor or in road embankments and other slopes where they are better protected from rain. It is a beautiful spider, but does not make for a great display specimen because replicating its natural environment in a way that will enable it to thrive in captivity requires providing it a considerable depth of damp substrate in which to burrow. The key to maintaining sufficient humidity for these rain forest spiders is to allow them a subterranean microenvironment in a deep shelter. In other words, for many of these species, their proper housing means that the keeper will seldom see the spiders, except when they are looking for food and sitting close to their tunnel mouths in ambush of prey.

HOUSING

A minimum depth of six inches of damp soil, coconut fiber or peat moss mix should be provided. Keepers who choose to display them using this minimum depth should provide a hollow half-log or similar sunk into the substrate to provide a location for the spider to dig its retreat. The wood will contribute to the shelter by forming 'the roof' and creating a dark, secure hiding place. Clear, plastic storage tubs are often the best enclosures for this type of set-up.

However, many breeders of earth tigers and other Asian burrowing tarantulas prefer to use tall enclosures that allow for substrate depths of ten or twelve inches or more. As the burrow is the location the tarantula will remain, floor space is superfluous and tall narrow enclosures are often made from plastic containers used for cereal storage or file folders, or in the case of smaller specimens even clear plastic gallon jars. Using a plastic container allows drainage holes to be drilled around the bottom rim so the enclosure can be placed over a pan and periodically flooded,

QUICK TIPS

- » 75-80°F with a drop in temperature at night (72-75°F)
- » Requires 70-80% humidity, but also good ventilation.
- » Tall enclosures allow for a great depth of substrate. Proper housing is best done by providing opportunity for deep burrows.

with the excess water draining out of the spider's home. This method maintains moist substrate without oversaturating it and flushes waste out.

CHILOBRACHYS

The genus *Chilobrachys* is prominent on the Indian Subcontinent, but also ranges into adjacent Southeast Asia. Perhaps the best known species is the Indian Violet (*Chilobrachys fimbriatus*), a small to moderate-size tarantula with

a striking pattern and attractive coloration, but there are a number of poorly identified larger and more uniformly-colored species in the hobby. *Chilobrachys* tarantulas are best known for using copious amounts of silk and lining their entire enclosures with silken tunnels and blankets of web. Few tarantulas worldwide incorporate so much silk into their retreats and its general area.

CYRIOPAGOPUS/HAPLOPELMA/ORNITHOCONUS

The genus name *Cyriopagopus* was recently used to replace *Haplopelma* and here refers to terrestrial burrowing spiders, not the arboreals like the Malaysian Earth Tiger long known as *Cyriopagopus schioedtei*. *Haplopelma* species like the Vietnamese Chevron (*H. longipes*) and Cobalt Blue (*H. lividum*) are typical "earth tigers". That is they are very defensive tarantulas that thrive when given the opportunity to dig a deep burrow in damp substrate. The closely related *Ornithoconus*, perhaps best represented by the Orange-fringed *O. aureotibialis* is identical in its husbandry requirements.

ORNITHOCONINAE SP.

As previously mentioned, there are a number of species of earth tigers in the hobby that are likely new species and haven't been identified even to genus level by breeders and dealers. They are therefore referred to with the subfamily name "Ornithoconinae" followed by the abbreviation for species (sp.) and a geographic or other identifying name like 'Vendula' (*Ornithoconinae* sp. 'Vendula'). Some of these spiders are terrestrial earth tigers, while others - for example, *Ornithoconinae* sp. 'South Mindinao' are actually arboreal members of the same subfamily.

INDIAN VIOLET

