

## **GUIDELINES FOR KEEPING SPIDERS AS PETS**

Some animals are dangerous to humans, and for this reason, extreme caution must be exercised when handling or caring for these animals. Many spiders are venomous and through their bites can inflict varying degrees of harm upon humans and animals. For this reason, owners and potential owners must be aware of the danger posed spiders as pets and make efforts to reduce these risks.

### **Permits**

In the Northern Territory, many native animals are protected under the Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act and therefore cannot be kept as pets unless the owner holds an approved permit to keep that animal (unless it is on the exempt species list). Some native animals are listed on the exempt species list, meaning that a permit is not required to keep these animals. However, these animals are protected and it is illegal to take them from the wild without an approved permit. For this reason, pet owners must retain their receipt as proof of purchase of this animal.

The Northern Territory Government promotes leaving native animals in the wild, however it is understood that some individuals wish to care for native animals, particularly those animals that can be domesticated.

Native animals require similar standards for food, hygiene, shelter and conditions as domestic pets. Moreover, in some cases, native wildlife may require more attention or greater requirements than other domesticated pets. It is important that individuals considering keeping native animals as pets consider these needs carefully before they make a decision, because in some cases, despite the best intentions, native animals have suffered from neglect (e.g. starvation, disease) because owners have not understood the needs or symptoms of the animal.

A number of spiders have been listed as threatened in the Northern Territory, making it an offence to remove these animals from the wild. For this reason, owners are strongly recommended to keep only those animals that have been purchased from a pet shop. Permits are required to import spiders into the Northern Territory and to take spiders from the wild.

### **Requirements**

Many spiders have specific requirements for temperature, humidity, light, habitat and nutrition. Be well informed about the needs of your pet before you buy it. As a general rule, you want to mimic the animal's natural environment as much as possible. However, it is important not to solely rely on the information that you obtain from the pet shop.

### **Housing**

Most spiders are capable of climbing and escaping through small gaps, so it is important to ensure that the enclosure is well sealed but provides enough airflow for the animal. Thus, all aquariums or containers should be sealed with a lid or cover, preferably one with small holes in the top. Soil or other substrate should be placed on the bottom of the enclosure, along with sticks and other debris – this will provide the spider with things to crawl over or hide underneath. Do not leave the container in the sun. Position it in a well lit, warm, shaded area.

### **Feeding**

Spiders are predators. Their common food items include crickets, bees, moths, grasshoppers, butterflies, and flies. Whilst pet shops will often sell insects for spiders, if you choose to collect food items yourself, it is important to be sure that these insects were not sprayed with insecticides; otherwise you may kill your pet! Usually spiders require feeding once or twice each week. However this will depend on the species and size of the spider, so ensure that you have information specific to your pet spider.

## **Water**

Water needs also vary according to the size of the spider; however plastic bottle caps or shallow bowls will serve as water dish. Alternatively, a soggy piece of cotton wool will also provide a spider with sufficient moisture. Never spray the cage or enclosure.

## **Handling**

Consider the following:

- Instead of rushing to handle any wildlife, take a moment to assess the situation and observe the behaviour of your pet. You may avoid an incident by recognising that your pet is stressed, anxious or poised to strike.
- Do not handle these animals any more than is absolutely necessary. Many animals do not like to be handled, and excessive handling will lead them to become aggressive.
- When required, handle dangerous wildlife gently and with respect. This will reduce the likelihood of the animal becoming aggressive.
- If you are bitten or stung by a venomous pet, it is advisable to seek medical attention immediately. The damage caused by the venom will increase over time, so waiting to see if you show symptoms is not a good strategy. Remain calm, sit quietly and await the arrival of an ambulance.

## **First Aid**

1. Get the patient to sit quietly and comfortably. Avoid movement as this increases the spread of the venom to other areas of the body.
2. Usually, it is best not to wash the area of the bite as this assists the hospital in prescribing the best anti-venom. In the case of a pet, this is probably not as important. However it may assist doctors, so it is probably best not to wash the venom off. Do not attempt to catch the snake. Do not attempt to suck the venom out of the bite.
3. Apply a firm bandage (but not so firm that it stops the flow of blood). This will stop the spread of the venom through the lymphatic system. Using a broad bandage, start at the location of the bite and move down the limb.
4. Immobilise the limb using a splint or sling. Otherwise, lie still and keep the limb motionless.
5. Seek medical assistance.
6. Monitor the patient for breathing and circulation. Never leave the patient alone.

In the case of a red back spider, ice should be applied and medical assistance should be sought immediately.

## **Health**

Spiders are relatively susceptible to fungal, viral and bacterial infections, making it even more important to wash your hands well before handling them.

Most spiders have a relatively short life span.