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Aussie Bird Eating Spiders as pets

General Ecology: Australian Bird Eating Spiders also known as Australian Tarantulas are found in a variety of terrestrial habitats across Australia. Bird-eating Spider is a name commonly used to describe two families of large Mygalomorph spiders. These large, brown and hairy spiders are also known as brush-footed spiders and some species are called whistling spiders due to their ability to produce whirring or humming sounds. Both males and females accomplish this by rubbing together modified bristles and ridges on the sides of the chelicerae and palps. The sounds are used during courtship and may act as a deterrent to predators that enter the spider's burrow or attempt to dig it out. Bird-eating Spiders have strong piercing jaws, known as chelicerae, which have multiple uses apart from the injection of venom into their prey. They are also used for the capture of prey, for defence and in some species to dig burrows. Most build deep ground burrows and feed mainly on arthropods, especially insects, but they will readily take frogs and lizards. Bird-eating Spiders can go for extended periods without eating.

Spinnerets are used for spinning silk, which is used in the construction of webs, the lining of retreats or burrows, to wrap up their prey and form egg cases. A pair of sensory palps (one each side of the chelicerae) is used for the manipulation of prey, to sense vibration, detect smells and even for the transfer of sperm during mating.

Once mating is completed the female may eat the male, if not, he often dies. The female lays her eggs into a silken sac, which she normally, although not always, guards from other predators. Once hatched, spiderlings resemble tiny adult spiders but are generally lighter in colour. The young remain with the female or in the bottom of the burrow for several months before leaving and constructing their own burrows, often in the vicinity of the maternal burrow. Several moults (shedding of the skin) are needed before the spider reaches sexual maturity. Bird-eating Spiders reach sexual maturity within 4 -7 years and the females of certain species have been known to live in excess of 20 years.

Food Requirements: All spiders are predatory animals, which usually feed nocturnally when they are more active. Bird-eating Spiders will feed on a variety of other invertebrates, although vertebrates are often part of their diet. They capture and kill prey around the mouth of their burrow, which are detected from vibrations through the soil. Once injected the spider's venom acts on its prey in two important ways; firstly it immobilises or kills the prey and secondly; because spiders can only consume liquids, it acts as digestive juice to liquefy the prey's internal components. Venom is injected into the prey with fangs, which comprise the lower section of the chelicerae. Once drained of its internal nutriment, the empty exoskeleton of the prey is discarded.

Enclosures: Bird-eating Spiders need only a simple glass aquarium with ample surface area. The vivarium should have a well ventilated and escape proof lid as these spiders can climb up vertical glass. Bird-eating Spiders require a substrate into which they can burrow. Inert soil (no chemicals) and/or a layer of peat moss, topped with some sphagnum moss can be used for this purpose. A shallow bowl of water and heating is essential, as many species are of tropical origin. A reptile-heating mat will maintain required temperatures of around 26oC to 30oC at one end of the enclosure, while room temperature is adequate in the area away from the heating mat.

Safe Handling: Bird-eating Spiders **cannot be safely handled**. All spiders bite and Bird-eating Spiders can be aggressive if provoked. They belong to a family of spiders, which possess venom that is toxic to vertebrates and may cause severe illness to humans. Within the same subclass is the Funnel-web Spiders, which is the most dangerous genus of spiders in the world. The keeping of Bird-eating Spiders is only recommended for mature persons over the age of 18 years.

WARNING: Fly spray or any other repellent will kill your spider. Don't leave your spider in the sun, it will only take a few minutes to fry your spider.

**For the acquisition of bird eating spiders and further information
 phone Shane at Gates of Eden Nature Centre on (02) 4973 3858**