

INSEKTUS FACT SHEET

Giant Burrowing Cockroach (*Macropanesthia rhinoceros*)

DISTRIBUTION

Queensland and Western New South Wales. These interesting creatures live in an under ground burrow, about 1 metre deep, they come out of their burrows at night to collect leaf litter which is taken back to the burrow and eaten (recycled) these animals do a similar job to earth worms in recycling nutrients back into the environment where they can be used by the surrounding vegetation.

DIET

The preferred diet for this insect is dried eucalyptus leaves of various species and other associated matter such as bark, dried grass and twigs. In captivity they can occasionally eat small amounts of fruit such as apple, which needs to be removed when no longer fresh. Avoid dog pellets as it can contain harmful ingredients. For available water source a damp tissue ball needs to be provided.

HOUSING

A small enclosure makes ideal housing for this insect. The humidity needs to be kept at a reasonable level(70%), so only supply a small amount of ventilation. Do not let the tank dry out. A layer of sandy soil is ideal for the cage.

CARE

This insect requires little maintenance, which is only really necessary when food is low or too old. Make sure the tissue ball remains moist at all times. If the soil is completely dry, it is advisable to add moisture by light misting. These insects are dry country dwellers so never over spray or make too wet. Every couple of months change the sandy soil.

SOME INTERESTING FACTS

- These are the largest cockroaches found in Australia.
- They construct and live in underground burrows up to 1 metre in depth.
- Individuals can weigh over 30 grams.
- They can live from 7 to 14 years in captivity.
- If mites are found crawling on an adult cockroach, these are specific to cockroaches and will not affect humans.
- They will die if roughly handled.
- Make sure leaves are insecticide free and that no insecticide is sprayed near them.
- Do not expose to direct sunlight for long periods.



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Some Additional Cockroach Information

NAME: *Macropanesthia rhinoceros*

DISTRIBUTION: Queensland to Western New South Wales

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT: These cockroaches normally live in burrows 1 metre deep in sandy soils where the temperature is about 20o C all year. They eat a diet of dried leaves that they collect from the soil surface, generally following summer rain.

There are over 4000 species of cockroaches in the world. Australia has about 450. Cockroaches are a very old group of insects and are among the most primitive of winged insects. They have existed for 250 million years, which is 100 times longer than man and his ancestors.

There are only six or so cockroach species that are considered pests in Australia. These are all exotic and are the domestic cockroaches which feed on food scraps, paper, etc. Most people regard cockroaches as loathsome, dirty creatures, nasty smelling, quick or erratic movers often being encountered at night.

Most of the Australian cockroaches live in the bush and hide in leaf litter or under the bark of trees and feed on decaying plant matter. Some bush cockroaches are rather pretty and have red, yellow and blue colours, probably to serve, as a warning to would be predators. These cockroaches are generally very distasteful.

There is a group of soil burrowing cockroaches, which are wingless, slow moving, and have no detectable odour. *Macropanesthia rhinoceros* is one of the species. Nowhere else in the world, besides Australia, do cockroaches construct permanent underground burrows where they live. They perform a useful ecological role in recycling nutrients in forests. The bulkiest cockroach in the world is a soil burrower. They can weigh over 300 grams compared to an American cockroach weighing 1 gram.

All have similar biology. They are found in sandy soils in which they construct burrows, 0.3-1.0 metres deep. Here they live and feed on fallen twigs and dry leaves collected from the surface. A mother produces up to 30 young - born alive- around November each year. These stay with their mother for about 6-9 months living on food provided by their mother.

The young then leave and each individual constructs a burrow of it's own. It takes about 3-4 years to reach adulthood and adults have been known to live for 7 years. Adult males are invariably found with nearly mature females. They appear to be waiting for them to become fully mature at which time mating occurs and then the male leaves the burrow.

Regards, Stephen J Fellenberg (Bug man)

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