



Handle with care

Stick insects

Species: Indian stick insect
(there are lots of others which could be listed but this is the most common)
Scientific names: *Carausius morosus*

Description

The Indian stick insect is the most commonly available of all stick insect species. Indian stick insects are normally olive green, but brown and yellow-green colours occur too. Their twig and leaf-like appearance gives them good camouflage. An adult stick insect measures about 7.5cm after about five or six skin moults and will live for about a year.

Life in the wild

Stick insects live in tropical and semi tropical areas of the world. They are vegetarians and eat the leaves of plants, shrubs and trees. Privet and bramble leaves are favourites. In the wild they are usually eaten by birds, so stick insects tend to feed at night when birds are not around.

Source of animals

Stick insects can be bought from pet shops or specialist breeders. RSPCA animal centres also occasionally have stick insects needing new homes.

Prior knowledge and preparation

Before keeping stick insects, it is crucial that any potential keeper finds out about them and how to provide for them in captivity. Only then can an informed decision be made about whether s/he can provide the facilities, time, financial means and long-term commitment to look after them properly. Suitable accommodation, food and the necessary accessories should be bought and prepared before taking the animal home. Novice keepers should also take the time to talk to experienced stick insect keepers and professionals – such as a vet – for further advice.

Vet care/costs/holiday cover

An injured stick insect may need treatment by an experienced vet. Holiday cover may be difficult to arrange, but your stick insects will need to be looked after properly every day by someone who understands their needs.

Unhealthy/healthy animal signs

A stick insect that is twitching has probably eaten leaves that have been treated with pesticide and is likely to die.

If a stick insect has lost a leg this is not fatal as it will grow another during its next skin change.

Mites can affect stick insects if their home is not kept clean and well ventilated.

Health issues to find out about:

- *Mites*
- *Skin shedding*
- *Parthenogenesis*

Why are stick insects vulnerable in captivity?

Stick insects are completely dependent on their owners to provide the correct accommodation and food. If they are given leaves which have been sprayed with pesticide they may die. If their home is too low and small they may not be able to climb out of their skins. If stick insects are not given enough space they may fight with and eat other stick insects that are being kept with them.

Handling/transporting the animal home

Stick insects are very delicate and should be handled with great care. It is best to pick them up with an artist's paintbrush. They can be transported home in a sturdy ventilated container in which their leaves are placed. Stick insects should never be left in parked cars on warm days – even with the windows open – as they could literally roast to death.

Needs: grouping, diet, accommodation and environment

Stick insects need to be kept with other stick insects, but not with any other types of insects. They need a large, well ventilated home that is kept indoors in a warm place out of direct sunlight. They should have plenty of room to climb out of their skins. The floor of their home should be lined with paper which should be changed once a week. When the home is being cleaned it is important to make sure that the stick insects are not thrown out with the old plants.

Stick insects need a diet of fresh leaves. Most will live on bramble and privet, but Indian stick insects eat privet, hawthorn and rose as well. The leaves should be kept on the twig and stood in a pot of water with a cover to prevent the insects drowning. The leaves need to be sprayed with water daily and then changed once a week. In some species of stick insect, females produce fertile eggs without mating. This is called parthenogenesis. Hundreds of eggs can be laid in a clutch. They should be collected and carefully destroyed.

THIS IS BASIC INFORMATION ONLY.

If you still believe that you could care for this animal then you must obtain further specialist information prior to taking on the responsibility.