

# Keeping Pet Stick Insects

## An Introductory Information Leaflet

from

in association with

**EURO REP**  
LIMITED

Europe's Premier  
Reptile Product Company

©EuroRep Ltd. / British Herpetological Supply 1999

### **Cleanliness and Hygiene:**

The cage will need cleaning out but only infrequently. A routine cleaner for all nonporous surfaces would be *Vetaclene*, followed by a thorough rinse. All other materials should be replaced when soiled. Any first aid the stick insects may be given, can be given by dabbing the wound with *Vetadine*. As far as human hygiene is concerned, *Vetasept Surgical Scrub* will clean hands and surfaces while *Vetasept Hand Rub* will allow adequate cleansing and disinfection even in cases when water is unavailable.

### **Background Heat**

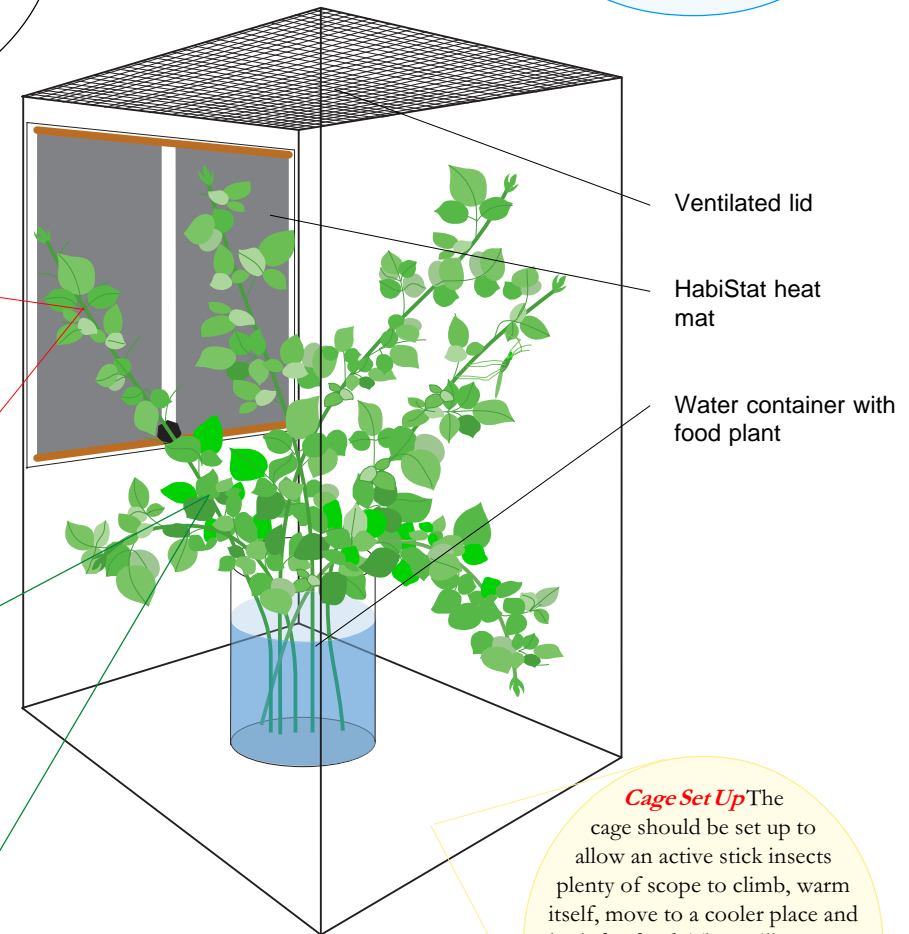
Use a heat mat between half and two thirds the size of the cage to provide background heating. The hottest spot in the cage should not be above 30°C while the coolest should not be below 20°C. Use a *HabiStat Mat-Stat* if the temperature is too hot but put the whole cage in a cooler place if the temperature is not cool enough.

### **Food:** Stick insects

are leaf eaters. Most species will take bramble; while many will take oak, raspberry and hawthorn. There are many other foodplants, so the preferences of the species being kept should be offered. Privet is only eaten by a few species but the common Indian Stick Insect will eat these leaves.

### **Lighting**

Many stick insects shun bright lights, so artificial light in the cage should be subdued. Often, just the daylight filtering in will be enough. If more light is needed, a small Spot Lamp may be used and in which case it will double as an effective heater.



A cage suitable  
for Stick Insects

### **Cage Set Up** The

cage should be set up to allow an active stick insects plenty of scope to climb, warm itself, move to a cooler place and look for food. They will want an occasional drink and to secrete themselves into refuges and hide. They will also need a secure surface to hang from when shedding their skins.

# Shopping List

Not every thing is needed to begin with, usually one item from each of the categories marked •. As a basic starting point the following essentials are considered the minimum needed:

## Plastic Cage Heat Mat Thermometer

After a while as your collection and experience grows other alternatives and extras can be used.

- **HabiStat Heat Mats** (4x5/4w, 6x11/7w, 11x11/12w, 17x11/20w, 23x11/28w, 29x11/35w, 35x11/42w & 49x11/55w) & **Strips** (17x6/10w, 23x6/15w, 35x6/22w & 47x6/30w)
- **Thermometers** (Alcohol, dial, minimum - maximum & electronic digital)
- **Hygrometers** (Dial & electronic digital)
- **HabiStat Thermostats** (Mat-Stat/100w, Temperature/300w, Twin/2x300, Pulse Proportional/600w, Dimming/600w & Night Time Drop Function)
- **Cork Bark**
- **Curio Wood**
- **Basking Spot Lamps** (Normal, Daylight & Red)
- **Basking Spot Lamp Holders**
- **Activa Professional Lights** (18"/15w, 24"/18w)
- **Arcadia Control Units** (15w, 2x15w, 18w, 2x18w, 20w & 2x20w)
- **Vetaclean**
- **Vetasept Surgical Scrub**
- **Vetasept Hand Rub**
- **Hand Spray**
- **Books & Leaflets**

© Euro Rep Ltd. / British Herpetological Supply 1997

# EURO REP LIMITED

The Cottage in the Wall, Dawley Road, Hayes, Middlesex. UB3 1EF  
Telephone: +44 (0) 20 8573 4311, Fax: +44 (0) 20 8561 1650  
email: care@eurorep.co.uk  
website: www.EuroRep.co.uk

## Pet Stick insects...

### ...Biology

Stick insects are insects and in many ways are similar to crickets and locusts. They have a direct life cycle for example, where the young develop as a series of nymphs which look like smaller versions of the adult. More advanced insects go through an indirect life cycle and develop via a larva and pupa. Some stick insects species make very good pet animals and are the subject of this leaflet. Pet stick insects will not infest the home if they escape and are completely harmless to humans and almost all other animals larger than themselves.

Some of the best pet species are:

- Spiny Stick Insects *Eurycantha calcarata*
- Prickly Stick Insect *Extatosoma tiaratum*
- Common or Indian Stick Insect *Carausius morosus*
- Pink Winged Stick Insect *Sipyloidea sipyilus*

Some other stick insects are not so good as pets. This is because they are a little tricky to rear and breed. Once some experience has been gained, however, it is quite possible to be successful with them. The species for the more experienced are: The European Stick Insects *Bacillus rossius*, The Mossy Stick Insects *Oryzines macklotii*, The Florida Stick Insect *Anisomorpha buprestoides*, and the Jungle Nymph *Heteropteryx dilatata*.

The types considered here are mainly tropical types that are on the whole quite large insects. Like all insects, stick insects have a tough exoskeleton and three pairs of jointed legs.

As the stick insects grows it will moult its outer skin periodically. On no account should it be touched or interfered with during this process. It will cast off the old skin and the emerged stick insects will often have regrown any legs that have been shed. The stick insects will be very soft and pale and may take a hour or two to harden off, during which time it will not feed. A space of about twice the length of the insect should be present to allow the animal to hang freely

### ...Housing

The permanent cage needs to be quite large, 50 cm. x 25 cm. x 25 cm. is enough for as few adults or several nymphs. The cage should be set up in a manner similar to the diagram overleaf. A heater may be installed to provide a background temperature of between 20°C and 30°C. This is best done with an *HabiStat* mat or strip taped to the inside of the back wall of a wooden cage or either side if the wall is glass or plastic. Make sure the mat acts like a radiator, so none of the surface should be obstructed.

Much of the success achieved in keeping stick insects will come from the skilful manipulation of ventilation. Some of these animals require high humidity others like it much dryer but none can stand stagnant air conditions. Fresh air moving into the cage is essential. Use the upward draughts caused by heated air rising to flush out the cage and drag fresh air in. A light misting with a hand sprayer will provide the 40% to 80% humidity required. All species will require at least one complete surface of the cage to be ventilated.

### ...Husbandry

All types can be kept in groups, usually of a single species but sometimes different species will also live together. Many will just sit motionless for most of the day, so plenty of perches should feature in the cage design. These animals do not really like being handled, so if it is neces-

sary to move them, pick them up by coaxing them onto a finger without holding them. They have two basic defences. One is to play dead and the other is to kick out with spiky legs and feet. This will give the sensation of tiny pin pricks but is not at all dangerous. If grasped the larger specimens may attempt to pinch the offending finger. They rarely break the skin.

In time the cage will begin to look scruffy as debris builds up. As all the cage furnishings are washable or disposable, a good clean out is easily done. The cage set up advised in this leaflet is practicable and can be made to look pleasing to the eye. It will, of course, be necessary to periodically change the food plant as it is eaten or withers. In any case, some of the very informative books on insects in general and stick insects in particular could be investigated.

### ...Food & Feeding

These stick insects are not really fussy about their food and will eat many plant species. The most commonly taken plant and the easiest to collect is bramble. Choose branches from a place where it is known no insecticides, herbicide or any other toxins have been used. Bramble can even be found in winter as it remains green under the snow.

Feed the stick insects continuously with enough to be eaten in a couple of days to a week. Do not leave dead and dying foodplant in the cage as it will only smell and become unpleasant.

Water is usually sipped from droplets on the leaves but if fresh greenery is offered it is unnecessary to provide drinking water. A light misting may be appreciated by some species, however, as high humidity may be an essential factor. Stick insects should not be able to freely approach water, either in the container holding the foodplant or in water dishes, they usually drown. Plug the container mouth up with extra leaves and twigs so the insects are safe.

### ...Reproduction

To sex a stick insects, both male and female specimens are initially required. Females are usually larger and more robust. Of the winged species, males have larger wings and many can fly. The females are, of course, the only sex to lay eggs. Stick insects are renowned for being able to reproduce without mating (parthenogenetically) and in some species males are quite rare. In captivity males seem more fragile than females and are often lost, thus forcing any continuation in captivity to be parthenogenetic.

Breeding is not at all difficult, just leave them alone and wait for the eggs to hatch. Most eggs are dropped at random in the cage. Some species bury the eggs, so look up the details of each particular kind. Try looking on the Internet or join a club like the Phasmid Study Group to get more information.

### ...Health & Disease

Stick insects may take several months to reach adult, it will depend on temperature, food availability and other factors. Once adult, life expectancy is usually a few more months. They do not suffer from many diseases and special attention is rarely needed. An environment and diet as described in this leaflet will preclude most problems. Good practice, hygiene and first aid will probably deal with rest. If real disease or injury is discovered, a suitable authority may of course, be consulted. Pet stick insects do not pose a real threat to human health. All the normal hygiene precautions regarding humans and animals should be observed.