
GIANT AFRICAN MILLIPEDE

(*Archispirostreptus gigas*)

Class: *Diplopoda*

Order: *Spirostreptida*

Family: *Spirostreptidae*

Characteristics:

The giant African millipede is the largest millipede in the world and can grow up to 11 in. long. Brownish black in color, it has two antennae, two compound eyes, 4 legs per body segment (usually 30-40 segments) except for head and tail and approximately 266 legs. Males and females look alike. Reproductive organs are on the underside. Small mites are often observed crawling on exoskeleton and among legs in a symbiotic relationship. Mites help clean millipedes exoskeleton in exchange for food and protection.

Behavior:

A docile species, it lives communally. Nocturnal and terrestrial, it will burrow to some extent or make its way into rotting wood. Rolls into a ball if disturbed. Has two modes of defense if threatened: (1) curling into a spiral (2) secreting irritating liquid from pores which can be harmful if introduced into nose and mouth; chews on rocks for calcium to maintain exoskeleton.

Reproduction:

Male emits pheromones to attract a mate. If accepted, he walks alongside female, slips underneath her and they wrap around each other. Female deposits hundreds of eggs in a hole and sometimes cares for them until hatching in 3 months. Hatchlings, born with only 3 pairs of legs and a few body segments, are precocial and will gain legs and body segments with each shed taking 7-20 sheds before fully grown.

Diet:

Wild: Herbivorous. Decaying plant matter.

Zoo: Produce sliced ½" (cucumber, apple, yam, zucchini, squash), romaine leaf.

Conservation:

Has not yet been evaluated by the IUCN but not endangered. Considered beneficial as they help recycle decaying plants. Predators include birds, small mammals, frogs and reptiles. Commonly seen in pet trade but banned by USA due to agricultural damages caused by mites they carry.

FYI:

Millipede: mille means thousand, pede means feet.

Centipede: centi means hundred, pede means feet.



Range & Habitat:



East Africa. Mozambique to Kenya in rain forest and coastal habitat containing trees.

Lifespan: up to 5-7 years in captivity; UK in the wild.

Special Adaptations: Barbs on body make it unpalatable as food.

IUCN Conservation Status:

Not Evaluated

