



Guidance on the keeping of Venomous Spiders and Scorpions (Venomous invertebrates)

Dangerous Wild Animals (Northern Ireland) Order 2004



1. Species Names

SPIDERS

Species of the genus <i>Phoneutria</i>	Wandering spiders
Species of the genus <i>Atrax</i>	The Sydney funnel-web spider and its close relatives
<i>Lycosa raptoria</i>	The Brazilian wolf spider
Species of the genus <i>Loxosceles</i>	Brown recluse spiders (otherwise known as violin spiders)
Species of the genus <i>Latrodectus</i>	The black widow spider (otherwise known as the redback spider) and its close relatives

SCORPIONS

Family <i>Buthidae</i>	All buthid scorpions
Including (but not restricted to) the Genera <i>Androctonus</i> , <i>Centruroides</i> , <i>Hottentotta</i> , <i>Leiurus</i> , <i>Parabuthus</i> and <i>Tityus</i>	At the time of writing, there are 639 known species of scorpions in the <i>Buthidae</i> family.

2. Additional information

All members of the genera, families and species listed in paragraph 1 above are included in the Schedule to the Order. Scorpion keepers should notify the Department of Environment of the species they wish to keep, so that checks can be done to determine whether a licence is required.

3. Housing overview

Spiders and scorpions must be housed in secure tanks (vivaria) or plastic containers kept inside a locked room. The plastic containers are normally secured in an escape proof locked cabinet.

The husbandry requirements of spiders and scorpions vary between species. It is therefore impossible to give detailed husbandry information for each species listed on the Schedule to the Order in a single document.

4. Keeping experience

In order to protect the welfare of the animals being kept, keepers must be able to demonstrate a good knowledge of husbandry and safe handling of the species they wish to keep. Keepers will be expected to demonstrate either a successful record of keeping the species concerned, or a good knowledge of the species' husbandry requirements. Visitors must NOT be allowed to handle venomous spiders or scorpions.

There should normally be a second named person nominated and included on the licence who is competent to care for the animals should the owner be absent or incapacitated.

Housing Recommendations

- 5. Construction** Spiders and scorpions have the ability to squeeze through very small gaps; therefore tanks or other containers must be solidly constructed, with tight-fitting lids, and covered ventilation holes.
- 6. Size** The amount of space required by these invertebrate species is quite small. So long as there is room to move around, access food and build a web or take refuge in a shelter (if appropriate), then the space provided is probably adequate.
- 7. Temperature** Temperature requirements vary between species, however a normal room temperature of between 24 – 26 °C is generally acceptable to most species.
- 8. Lighting** There is no specific lighting requirement for these species.
- 9. Ventilation** Humidity requirements will vary between species. Humidity may be increased locally by the provision of water or damp sponges in the enclosure or by spraying with a fine water mist.
- 10. Drainage/ Substrates** If drinking water is provided, the floor covering must be capable of absorbing any spillage. Suitable enclosure floor coverings vary between species. For invertebrates requiring high humidity levels, an absorbent substrate such as vermiculite, peat moss or bark chippings may be used.
- 11. Cleanliness** Tanks should be cleaned as required. Food debris should not be allowed to accumulate. The animals must be removed to secure temporary housing whilst a thorough clean is carried out.

- 12. Social dynamics and behavioural considerations** Venomous invertebrates are generally kept singly. Some species are more aggressive than others, and keepers should be aware of the risks when handling their animals.
- Handling of all species should be kept to a minimum.
- 13. Prevention of escape** Rooms in which venomous invertebrates are to be kept should be adapted to make escape from the room difficult. Specialist invertebrate rooms should have no open fireplace, and no gaps in the walls at all. Any ventilation ducts must be securely covered with a fine mesh to prevent animals escaping. Any windows should be sealed shut or covered with fine mesh.
- Vivaria housing spiders or scorpions should have solid sides, floor and top, with no gaps and covered air holes, and all tanks should be tightly secured unless access is necessary.
- It is strongly recommended that the primary tanks or boxes housing the animals be stored in a secondary, escape-proof lockable cabinet, which will contain any animals, should they escape.
- A 30 cm (1 ft) high lip at the bottom of the door (which the keeper must step over) will help to prevent an animal escaping from the room as the door is opened.
- The door to the room must be closed before animals are handled.

14. Food and drink

Spiders and scorpions are normally fed once a week on live food, for example mealworms or crickets. The appropriate food and feeding interval will vary between species and the size of specimen kept.

The use of calcium dusting or gut-loading supplements for live prey may be appropriate.

Drinking water is required by most species. Shallow dishes of water, with a means of escape if the animal should fall in, should be used. Alternatively, a sponge or other absorbent material may be used to absorb the drinking water to prevent the animals from drowning.

15. Visiting interval

The animals must be monitored at appropriate intervals, normally at least once every 24 hours.

16. Exercise and enrichment

Some species require a hide, such as an overturned flowerpot or bark. Some web-building spiders, such as the black widow, require only anchor points on which to build, such as twigs. Certain scorpion species will dig if sand, compost or bark is provided.

- 17. Protective equipment** The use of long-handled soft-tipped forceps is recommended to handle these species.
- When removing spiders or scorpions from their tank for any reason, it is recommended that the keeper work with a “tank within a tank”, i.e. surrounding the tank housing the animal with a larger tank (a large plastic storage box for example). If the spider or scorpion is dropped or wriggles off the forceps, it will still be retained in the second container.
- 18. Provision for moving the animal(s)** Some contingency for safely moving animals should be in place in case veterinary attention is required, or in the event of an emergency. A plastic box with a lockable, snap-on lid may be used. A licence, issued by the Department of the Environment, for the keeping of these animals may specify restrictions on the movement of these animals and procedures to be followed.
- 19. Emergency planning** There should be a written contingency plan in place to be used in the event of an emergency, for example fire, flood, animal escape or injury to the keeper.
- The greatest danger from venomous invertebrates is posed to the keepers themselves. The contingency plan should include the details of who to contact at a local hospital in case of being stung, and what the procedure is to deal with venomous stings, and this should be clearly displayed inside the room.

20. Notification Requirements

A licence, issued by the Department of the Environment, for the keeping of these animals may specify procedures to be followed in the event of an escape and on the provision of information to the Emergency Services (e.g. the Fire Service) on the dangerous wild animals being kept.

You are required to notify the Department of the Environment of any intentions to breed the animals.

When a licence is issued to keep venomous species, it is required that keepers must notify the local hospital in writing of which species are being kept, to allow the medical staff to research appropriate anti-venoms.

21. Prevention and control of spread of infectious disease

Ideally, keepers should establish contact with a veterinary practice able to advise them on the medical care of their animals. At the very least, arrangements should be in place for the emergency humane euthanasia and safe disposal of the species held. This would normally require the administration of an overdose of a gas anaesthetic followed by immersion in 70% alcohol, and would be carried out by a veterinary surgeon. Immersion of invertebrates in alcohol alone is not considered a humane method of euthanasia. The venom of these animals may still be harmful even after the animal is dead.

There are no transmissible diseases carried by these animals that pose a risk to the general public as long as there is no direct contact, and visitors are not allowed to handle the animals or their by-products.

Explanatory Notes

These notes have been produced to provide people wishing to keep dangerous wild animals with guidance on the requirements they may have to meet. In determining whether or not a licence should be issued, the Department of the Environment will consider the information provided by the applicant when applying for a licence. The Department will also arrange for a suitably qualified person to carry out an inspection of the premises at which the animal or animals will be kept and the inspector's report will also be taken into consideration. It is at the Department's discretion to waive certain recommendations, or add additional ones, to the guidance provided in this document. There is a right to appeal within 21 days if a licence is refused or if the applicant contests conditions applied to a licence.

Contact Information

For further information on the Dangerous Wild Animals (Northern Ireland) Order 2004, contact the Department of the Environment, Northern Ireland Environment Agency, Biodiversity Unit on (028) 9056 9557

For CITES enquiries:

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For rabies quarantine enquiries:

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