



Tarantula

(*Aphonopelma chalcodes*)

Order: Araneae Family: Theraphosidae

SIZE: Male 2-2 ½ inches in length, female 2-2 ¾ inches. Legspan up to 4 inches.

DESCRIPTION: Large, hairy body. Cephalothorax is gray to dark brown. Abdomen brownish black. Each leg has 2 claws at the tip and a tuft of hair underneath. Microscopic bristles on abdomen, which easily break off and irritate the skin or eyes of its enemy or prey. Large, venomous fangs, although the venom is similar to that of a bee sting. Venom is used to subdue prey. As they grow, they molt or shed their old exoskeleton.

SENSES: Have 8 closely grouped eyes, but do not have good vision.

HABITS: Found in areas of desert soil. Nocturnal. Live in a burrow lined with silk, but do not spin webs to catch prey. Males are short lived, but females may live 20 years or more. They are reluctant to attack humans.

DIET: Insects, lizards and other small animals such as mice.

RANGE: Arizona, southern California, New Mexico south into Mexico.

FAMILY LIFE: Male tarantulas, at 5-7 years of age, begin their search for a mate from August through October, then die shortly after mating. A male approaches the female's burrow and plucks the strands of web at the opening of the burrow to lure her out. If the female is not pleased with his tune, she may consume him. Female lays up to 300 eggs and conceals them in some natural cavity. White, tick-size babies hatch in six weeks.

ENEMIES: Javelina, birds, snakes, skunks, lizards, tarantula hawks (wasps) and toads. Tarantula hawks paralyze the tarantula by stinging it, and then lay one egg on it before burying it alive. The paralyzed tarantula serves as a food source for the wasp larvae.

DID YOU KNOW THAT...?

- Female tarantulas can be twice as heavy as males and live more than three times longer.
- In Arizona, there are 30 species of tarantulas.
- Tarantulas spend about 90 percent of their lives in their burrows.
- When they flip on their backs and appear dead, they are just shedding their exoskeleton.



Range

The tarantula is found in most of the warmer areas in Arizona.