

Whip Scorpion

Damon variegatus

Invertebrate

Scientific Name

Damon variegatus

Other Names

African whip scorpion

Range

Broad, discontinuous distribution from the Congo, through western Tanzania and Zimbabwe, to South Africa and Namibia.

Habitat

Tropical and temperate scrub forests

Description

A small, spider-like animal with an oval-shaped body. There are usually eight legs, but this can vary, as does size and color. The first pair of legs are elongated and resemble feelers. They have one pair of eyes on the front of the body and three along the sides. Females are larger than males.

Average Size

Body: 0.5 - 3 inches

With legs: 7.5 inches

Weight: 0.25 - 1 gram

Lifespan

2 - 3 years

Diet

In the wild: Insects, worms and crustaceans

In human care: Insects and worms

Clutch Size

6 - 60 eggs

Incubation

Unknown

Sexual Maturity

Unknown

Predators

Small mammals, birds and humans

Population Status

Not threatened



Behavior

Although they are part of the arachnid (spider) class, whip scorpions are neither spider nor scorpion, but resemble a cross between the two. They belong to the order Amblypygi, meaning blunt rump or tailless. Nocturnal and arboreal, they protect themselves by hiding under leaves and debris by day. They have relatively poor eyesight and use their front whip-like legs as sensory organs to aid in hunting and orientation. The pedipalps (leg-like mouthparts) are used to capture and hold insect prey as it is torn apart by the chelicerae (fangs).

Males of the same species have extremely interesting ways of establishing dominance. When unfamiliar individuals encounter one another, they engage in a kind of fighting behavior. Individuals typically display their pedipalps to each other and flick one another with their long front legs. These fights can escalate, with males making full body contact and pushing against each other. Like other arachnids, they will molt several times during their life.

Reproduction and Breeding

The male courts the female with trembling movements of his long front legs, guiding her to a sperm packet he has deposited. The female then inserts it into her reproductive opening. Eggs are kept in a membranous sac underneath her abdomen until they hatch. The white-colored hatchlings are carried on their mother's back until their second molt, after which they scatter into the forest.

Conservation

Whip scorpions are not listed on IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature) and are not protected in any part of their range. They are considered not threatened and are common throughout their range.



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Amazing Facts

It has been estimated that there are about 150 known species of whip scorpions.

Professor Moody used one of these to practice his “Unforgivable Curses” in the movie “Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire.”

This “scorpion” does not have a stinger or venom, but can pinch with its pedipalps.