



## Flat Rock Scorpion

Their distinguishing features, and where they get part of their common name from, is that their head (prosoma) and body (mesosoma) is extremely flat. In fact when you first see one you may think you are looking at a squashed scorpion. The tail (metasoma) of a flat rock scorpion is also different to how people imagine a scorpions tail to look like. It is very thin and in males of the genus extremely long with a very small vesicle (sting). The claws (pedipalps) of Hadogenes species are also quite unique among scorpions, being large, thin and flattened. Because of their unique appearance flat rock scorpions are very easy to distinguish from other types of scorpions. In my opinion they are not the most pretty of scorpions (if you can call a scorpion pretty) but they make up for this with their strange, almost comical appearance.

All members of the Hadogenes genus originate from Southern Africa (South Africa, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Tanzania, Namibia etc.) and all 19 different members of the genus have adapted to live in cracks and crevices of rocks. This is why they have evolved such flattened bodies, so they can fit into the tiniest of spaces. As a rule Flat Rock Scorpions are found in dry arid areas and mountains. In these habitats they are restricted to outcrops of rocks that have an abundance of small holes and cracks for them to shelter in.

Flat rock scorpions are shy, skittish animals that prefer to flee and hide rather than face a potential threat. Mine will react to even the slightest vibrations, such as someone walking about in another room, and will immediately reverse back into its hide until it feels the 'threat' has gone.

I have never once seen my flat rock scorpion use it's sting or claws in a defensive manner even when I have been moving it into a new enclosure. Although I have never been stung by a flat rock scorpion, from reading and speaking to other keepers the effects of a sting from both *H. paucidens* and *H. troglodytes* ranges from nothing but a pinprick to a slight stinging sensation likened to that from a nettle. It is thought that flat rock scorpions have some of the mildest venom of any group of scorpions however, care should always be taken to avoid being stung, especially if you suffer from allergies from stings by other invertebrates such as wasps, bees etc.

No scorpion should ever be picked up by the bare hands. In my opinion it puts both you and more importantly the scorpion at risk from being hurt or, in the scorpions case dropped and killed. As said earlier flat rock scorpions are very skittish and shy. Because of these traits it is particularly stressful for them to be handled like a pet.

If needing to move a flat rock scorpion from its enclosure for maintenance etc. use a small container (crickets tubs work well) and a thin stick or pen to gently push/ guide it in with. Avoid picking it up by the tail. As has already been mentioned, this species has a very thin metasoma and a large body, by using this method you could potentially damage your scorpion due the strain put on the tail.

## Housing

Due to their large size I would suggest an enclosure of 14" x 10" x 10" as a minimum for an adult (possibly larger for an adult male *H. troglodytes*). This will allow plenty of space to create the correct hides/habitat within. Plain glass aquariums with a lid or all glass vivarium's with hinged doors (exo terras etc.) are perfect. The enclosure should have good ventilation to keep the humidity low.

The cage should have a thin layer of substrate on the bottom. I find a 1" - 2" layer of sand and

coco fibre mix (60/40) is the easiest and cheapest way to replicate the dry, sandy soil that would be found in *H. paucidens* natural habitat. Flat rock scorpions do not burrow so the substrate does not need to be any deeper than this.

Design and decoration of flat rock scorpions enclosures is particularly important. These scorpions are very specialised to live in the cracks of rocks and so this needs to be as closely replicated in captivity as possible. Probably the easiest way to do this is to go to your local reptile/ aquatic shop or garden centre and buy some appropriately sized pieces of slate or similar flat, stackable rocks or, go out in to the countryside or beach and have look what you can find. Wash any rocks you buy or collect to get rid of any dust and possible nasties that might be on them.

When I have got enough rock I place a large piece so that the underneath of it rests on the bottom glass of the enclosure to ensure it provides a stable base for the others placed above it. I then play about until I have around 3 or 4 layers of rock with thin gaps between them. Gap size is very important to make your scorpion feel secure. Do not stack the rocks so that there is huge, wide gaps between each layer as the scorpion will feel like it has no where safe to hide. Aim for clearance to be 1cm to 2.5cm between each rock. You will probably find that your scorpion will prefer to hide in the smallest crevices available.

Alot of people recommend glueing each layer of rock together to avoid any disasters with rocks falling off and crushing the scorpion. IMO this is not necessary providing you ensure the rocks are firmly in place and can not easily be knocked over. It also means that if you ever need to move your scorpion you can do so easily by carefully lifting the rocks off.

Extra decoration can be added to the enclosure to make it more interesting. Dry grasses, weathered driftwood and scattered rocks

## Heating

use a 7w (11" x 6") heatmat stuck to the back of the enclosure. This keeps the temperature at the warm (mat) side at around 25c - 26c and between 21c and 23c at the 'cool'side. Infra red heat bulbs are also a great way to heat flat rock scorpion enclosures as they provide a very natural radiation of heat from above.

Note: heat mats should never be used underneath a scorpion enclosure.

## Water

Flat rock scorpions come from dry habitats and so do not like to be kept in humid enclosures. Aim for a relative humidity of 50% or below.

I provide a small dish of water once every week or two and allow it to dry out. I have never once seen this species use a water dish. Periodically (every month or so) I spray the enclosure very lightly with water. I find it is beneficial and when I do this my *H. paucidens* will always emerge from its hide and drink the water droplets that have collected on the glass.

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## Humidity

## Feeding

Feeding this species is fairly simple and very cheap. I feed mine 1 - 2 crickets that are no bigger than its pedipalp (claw) every 7 - 10 days. I have used larger prey but find that flat rocks either struggle to get a hold of them or get scared of them.

Flat rocks are notorious for going on fasts and will quite happily not eat for a few months. This is completely normal so do not worry. Keep offering crickets and remove them if not eaten until your scorpion starts eating again. A good sign that your scorpion is hungry again is when it starts sitting with its head and claws sticking out of its hide.

## Sexing

Sexing flat rocks is very easy. The male will have a much longer metasoma (tail) than the female.

## Breeding

I have never bred this species but again from speaking to other keepers and reading books/papers, they are very difficult to breed in captivity. Gestation period can be as long as 18 months and although apparently not particularly difficult to raise, the young take a long time to grow. Eventually reaching maturity after 7 years or more

## Longevity

Hadogenes species are probably among the longest lived scorpions. It is thought that H. troglodytes can have a lifespan up to 30 years. Most of the scorpions available to buy are wild caught adults so determining their age is next to impossible. Sudden deaths with this species can occur and it is likely that this is because the scorpion was already old when collected.