

# Imperial scorpion



**Scientific name:** *Pandinus imperator*

**Country:** Democratic Republic of Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Guina-Bissau, Nigeria, Togo, Benin , Chad , Liberia, Sierra Leone

**Continent:** Africa

**Diet:** Insects, small mammals

**Food & feeding:** Carnivore

**Habitats:** Tropical rainforest, tropical grassland

**Conservation status:** Not Threatened, CITES Appendix II listed.

**Relatives:** Black widow spider, Mexican red-kneed bird-eating spider

**Description:** The scorpions belong to the class Arachnida, which includes the spiders, ticks, mites and harvestmen. There are about 1,300 species of scorpion worldwide and they are characterized by having an elongated body with four pairs of legs, a pair of pincers and a long thin curved tail that is tipped with a poisonous sting. They are commonly thought of as desert-dwelling animals, but in fact, can be found in a variety of habitats. The imperial scorpion comes from the

tropical rainforests and grasslands of West Africa. Like all scorpions, they like to burrow under ground often in termite mounds and can also be found beneath rocks and other debris. They are one of the largest species of scorpion in the world, with adults measuring up to 20 cm long and weighing 30 grams. They look highly dangerous, but the venom of this species is not very toxic. However, the site of the sting can easily become infected and the pincers themselves can cause a nasty puncture wound.

**Lifestyle:** They usually live near riverbanks and waterholes and hunt their prey at night. They capture a range of animals, including insects, arachnids, mice and lizards using their large pincers. They fall prey to other animals, particularly baboons that tear off the scorpion's tail and eat the remaining body.

**Family & friends:** Female scorpions look after their young for the first few weeks, carrying them on their backs.

**Keeping in touch:** Courting scorpions perform a dance where both male and females circle around one another, pincers outstretched, before gingerly grabbing each other by the pincers. Sperm is then deposited by the male on the ground and the female, still holding onto the male, backs up over the sperm and takes it up inside her body.

**Growing up:** The imperial scorpion reaches sexual maturity at about four years of age. The females are oviparous, meaning they give birth to live young, which are tiny replicas of the adults. The young are carried on the mother's back until their first moult, at which time they leave to fend for themselves. At birth, the scorpions are white in colour but slowly become darker with each moult until they are dark blue or black, like their parents. The average lifespan is eight years.

**Conservation news:** The imperial scorpion's main enemy is people. Numbers have been greatly reduced by over-collection for the pet trade, resulting in the species being listed in CITES Appendix II, restricting further trade in this species.