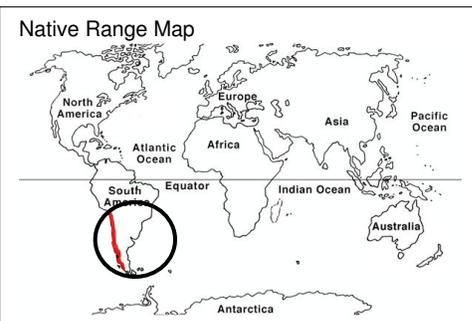


Chilean Rose-haired Tarantula



Kingdom: Animalia
Phylum: Arthropoda
Subphylum: Chelicerata
Class: Arachnida
Order: Araneae
Family: Theraphosidae
Genus: *Grammostola*
Species: *gala*



Photo courtesy of Karen Marzynski

Habitat

- **In the Wild:** This species of tarantula can be found in Chile, in dry grassland regions at the edge of the desert.
- **Exhibit Location:** Zoo to You Collection

Characteristics

- Adults grow to be 4.5 – 5.5 inches in diameter.
- There are 2 different color schemes, depending on where in Chile they are from. Many are brownish, while others are more reddish or pink in color.
- This tarantula has a hard external skeleton (exoskeleton) and 8 jointed legs. The exterior of the body is covered by long, bristle-like hairs. There is a smaller pair of sensory appendages called pedipalps. They have 8 eyes, 2 fangs, and are venomous (poisonous). They have a cephalothorax (composed of the head and thorax) to which all appendages except the spinnerets (tubular structures from which web silk are produced) are attached. The spinnerets are found on the abdomen.
- Individual hairs may be sensitive to motion, heat, cold, and other environmental triggers. Hairs near the mouth are capable of sensing chemicals that give the spider a basic type of sense of smell and taste.
- **Lifespan: In the Wild** males 3-10 years, females 15-20 years; **In Captivity** males less than 2 years, females 20 or more years (average is 12 years)

Behaviors

- The Chilean rose-haired tarantula is a nocturnal (nighttime) hunter and finds a shelter to web itself into at dawn.
- Their digestive system is designed to deal with liquid food only. Their venom interferes with the prey's nervous system (neurotoxin) or by breaking down the body's tissues (cytotoxin). To digest its prey, it vomits a mixture of digestive enzymes onto its food, breaking the tissue down into a liquid that can then be sucked up through the spider's mouthparts. Spider droppings consist mostly of uric acid crystals and are usually dry and chalk-like.
- **Enrichments at the Zoo:** rearrangement of exhibit furniture

Reproduction

- Chilean rose-haired tarantulas reach sexual maturity at 2-3 years of age. Mating season is in September and October.
- The male develops tibial spurs or "mating hooks," and swollen tips on both pedipalps which contain a chamber where sperm is stored as well as a syringe-like instrument used to insert semen into the female. A male must leave the safety and security of the burrow and wander around until he finds a female in her shelter. The female leaves chemical signals called pheromones in the silk that lines her shelter.
- The male begins a courtship display that varies from species to species. If receptive, the female responds with a display of her own, usually by tapping her feet on the ground. She then turns to face the male and opens her fangs, exposing the genital opening at the bottom of her abdomen. The male uses his first set of legs (mating hooks) to grab the female's fangs, pushing her upwards allowing him to release his sperm, fertilizing the female. The male will then attempt a hasty retreat, usually escaping his lethal (deadly) mate.

- The gestation period is 6 weeks. The female constructs an egg sac and lays a large number of eggs (from 80 to over 1000). She will carry the egg sac around with her and aggressively guard it against any intruders until the spiderlings emerge.

Diet

- **In the Wild:** insects and other arthropods, sometimes small animals (cannot swallow solid food)
- **At the Zoo:** crickets

Conservation Status

- **IUCN status:** not listed; **CITES Appendix:** not listed
- Because of the wide-spread collection of this species from the wild for the pet trade, increasing regulation in the future is probably inevitable in order to protect it from becoming threatened and/or endangered. There are a number of other tarantula species in the world that are currently protected, and several more may be in the future. There are a few laws in effect now, but this is an area mostly unregulated at the present time.
- **Predators:** various nocturnal animals (large mammals, reptiles, other tarantulas), hunting wasps, parasitized by nematodes or roundworms

Did You Know?/Fun Facts

- The Chilean rose-haired tarantula is the hardiest of tarantulas and is easy to find in captivity. Although it has a reputation for being docile (calm), it varies widely from individual to individual. They may become nippy.
- Hairs on the abdomen have been modified to serve as defense weapons. They possess sharp tips with microscopic barbs. When threatened, the tarantula will use its back legs to kick off a cloud of hairs at its attacker.
- In most tarantula species the female will live for twenty years or more, but the male may survive only the few years required to reach maturity. Once the male has fulfilled the biological function of mating, it usually will die of natural causes or the female may eat him. The male's lifespan is further shortened by the stress of captivity.
- All tarantulas have a certain amount of venom. Although most people are not affected by this species, some people may be allergic to its venom, or just more sensitive, making it a dangerous situation. This is one of the reasons why people should not handle this tarantula.

Sources:

- California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, (n.d.). Class: arachnida, order: araneae (spiders). Retrieved Feb. 07, 2006, from Cal Poly Pomona Web site: <http://www.csupomona.edu/~rskaae/CD1/spiders.html>.
- Flank, Jr., L. (1998). *An owner's guide to a happy healthy pet - the tarantula*. New York: Howell Book House.
- The Central Pets Educational Foundation, (n.d.). Chilean rose tarantula. Retrieved Oct. 22, 2005, from CentralPets.com Web site: <http://www.centralpets.com/animals/insects/tarantulas/tar2567.html>.