

## The Desert Dwellers

### Muaad Al-Shaibani



Source: Discovery Communications Inc. (2002)

Known as the desert dwellers, scorpions can also live in grasslands, savannas, forests, and caves. These insects which come from the arachnid class have a simple but interesting behavior. Scientists have found that scorpions are florescent under ultraviolet lights. What makes them different from other animals are how they feed themselves, how they mate, and how the mothers take care of their newborn babies.

Scorpions are predatory night insects that feed on other insects, spiders, centipedes, and even smaller scorpions. How they get the food is interesting. Scorpions situate their prey by transmitting vibrations that bounce off the objects on the ground using sensitive sensors located on their legs. They use the surface of their body to censor air vibrations in order to catch flying insects. The scorpion is a sit and wait predator that hides without moving until the prey moves close. As the scorpion spots a prey, it runs to and seizes the prey which turns motionless; then, it tears the prey into pieces, and sucks its body liquids. Finally, the scorpion takes its prey and that takes time to enjoy its prey. When I was in high school, we had an experiment to observe the moves of the scorpion. We brought a female scorpion with its babies and put them all in one container. After one week we opened the container to find that the mother ate all its small babies to survive. This experiment showed that scorpions are aggressive.

In a mating ritual, a male scorpion uses his pedipalps to grasp the female's leading her to a "courtship dance". However, these rituals differ from species to species. Royo (1996) noted that one species use:

A structure deposited by the male on the surface over which the female is pulled. The male sweeps his pectines over the ground surface to help locate a suitable place to deposit his spermatophore, usually a rock or stick. The female draws the sperm into her genital pore, which is located near the front on the underside of her abdomen.

After mating, the male usually leaves the female because if he does not, the female will likely eat him. After mating comes a period of gestation which takes a long

time (from a couple of months to a year and a half). Embryos develop in their mother's overuterus. During this time, embryos are fed by their mom's digestive gland. As scorpions are born, they live on their mother's back. A "birth basket" is made to assist youngsters in various ways. They leave the mother's back as they molt for the first time. When they leave, they are assumed to be independent; this means that if the mother is hungry, she may eat any of her babies.



Source: Royo (1996)

Although scorpions are always associated with evil, they do not deserve such an accusation. The way they catch their prey, or the way a mother scorpion takes care of its babies indicates that scorpions are not evil animals; on the contrary, they are survivors.

#### References

Discovery Communications Inc. (2002). Retrieved September 29, 2002 from <http://animal.discovery.com/fansites/jeffcorwin/carnival/crawel/scorpion.html>

Royo, A.R. (1996). Scorpions. Desert USA. Retrieved September 29, 2002 from [http://www.desertusa.com/oct96/du\\_scorpion.html](http://www.desertusa.com/oct96/du_scorpion.html)