

# HISSING COCKROACHES

Hissing cockroaches are native to Africa and Madagascar, there are several species. All are large, approximately 6-8 cm long and brown in colour. They are capable of emitting a loud hissing sound when disturbed. The sound is produced by air being forced through the breathing tubes and out of the spiracles, rather like a whistle. Hissing cockroaches live for many years and can become very tame. My own pet one is called Alf, he often visits schools with me, the children love to stroke him. He is so used to being handled that he rarely hisses now. Hissing cockroaches are slower moving than most cockroaches, which makes them more suitable as pets.

## HOUSING

Hissing cockroaches can be housed in various containers, however the most suitable are plant propagators or fish tanks. Cockroaches can climb glass and a lid is therefore essential. They are amiable creatures and can be housed with other invertebrates i.e.. millipedes, beetles and other cockroach species. The cage should be furnished with vermiculite on the floor and pieces of bark to hide under. Something to climb on should also be provided. Cockroaches thrive at warm temperatures and their cage should be maintained at 20-25 C. Warmth can be provided by a heating mat, a light bulb or by housing in a heated propagator.

## FEEDING

Cockroaches are not fussy eaters, they are scavengers and will eat almost anything. They can be fed on fruit, vegetables, cereals etc. I like to give a varied diet, they are especially fond of lettuce and apple and enjoy the odd piece of chocolate. A bowl of water can be provided, but it is not usually necessary as the cockroaches obtain enough moisture from their food. It is important to keep the cage fairly dry. They do not do well in damp conditions. In the wild cockroaches can go for long periods of time without food.

## BREEDING

Although cockroaches have a reputation for prolific breeding, This is not always the case with Hissing Cockroaches. I find that the cockroaches will often only breed when they are living in a group. Cockroaches generally lay egg cases, however Hissing cockroaches bear live young. They do produce an egg case but this is incubated within the body. The number of young varies, but can be as many as fifty. The young are white and turn brown later as their skin hardens. A cockroach sheds its skin several times before becoming an adult, with each skin change the new body is white and the cockroach will remain still until the skin hardens. Baby cockroaches eat the same as adults and take about nine months to mature. And must remain still until the skin hardens. Baby cockroaches eat the same as adults and take about nine months to mature.