

Madagascar Hissing Cockroaches



What do we look like?

We are a species of cockroach that grow to be 2-5 inches in length. Since we are insects, our bodies are covered with a shiny, and hard, exoskeleton. Our shell colors are black or dark brown near our heads and a red-orange color farther down our abdomen. Like most cockroaches, we don't have any wings and have six spiny legs used for climbing vertically. We can even climb up smooth glass surfaces with our powerful legs. Males are much different than females. Our males have two bump-like horns on their shell above their heads and have hairy antennae. Females have smooth shells above their heads and have smooth antennae. We also have some unusual breathing pores on our bodies that we use to hiss. When we get excited or cornered we push air out of these pores which make a hissing sound. The sound can be so startling that predators will confuse us for snakes just long enough for us to make an escape. Our hissing is called a defense mechanism.

Where we live is...

Like our name suggests, we are native to the island country of Madagascar, off of the eastern coast of Africa. We like to live on the forest floors of the island where there is a dense covering of fallen leaves and fruit for us to eat. We are cold-blooded, making it easy for us to live in warm, humid climates like the tropical forests of Madagascar or in room temperature classrooms.



What do we eat?

We are nocturnal scavengers; that means we eat almost anything we can find on the forest floors when we are active at night. We enjoy mostly vegetables and fruits like bananas, apples and grapes, but since we are scavengers we eat fallen leaves, dog food, crackers, fruit mold and bark as well.



Some cool facts about us...

- We are very docile insects, making us very easy to handle. We never bite and when picked up our spiny legs tickle your hand. You should try holding one of us when you visit the cave habitat at EarthWorks!
- We are movie stars, darling! Our species of cockroach are so easily handled that we are frequently used in movies that require insects crawling around. You can find us on shows like *America's Next Top Model Cycle 6* and *Fear Factor*.
- We have two types of hisses. The first is the disturbance hiss, which we use when disturbed by predators. Males, however, have a hiss they use when challenging other males called a fighting hiss.
- We are the largest species of cockroach in existence, and if taken care of properly, we can reach up to 5 years in age.

