

## Giant African Millipede (*Archispirostreptus gigas*)

**Habitat and Distribution:** Rainforests of Western Africa

**Size:** 4-12 inches long

**Wild Diet:** Decaying plant matter (fruit and leaves)

**Predators:** Birds, small mammals, frogs and reptiles

**Life Span:** 5-7 years (captive life span)

**Reproduction:** Millipedes lay hundreds of eggs at a time, which they bury in the soil on the forest floor. The eggs hatch after about 3 months. Young millipedes start out with only three pairs of legs. Each time they molt, they acquire more legs. They will molt 7-10 times before acquiring 200-300 legs. Young millipedes typically molt within the first 12 hours after hatching.

**Behavior:** These millipedes can be found under rocks and in forest underbrush. They are mostly nocturnal, and use their strong legs to burrow in the forest floor. If disturbed, they coil into a tight ball, using their tough exoskeleton as a defense. As a second line of defense, they can secrete a foul smelling/tasting fluid from glands located along their body that is unpalatable to predators.

**Conservation Connection:** Secure, however their rainforest homes are threatened.

**Interesting Facts:** There are currently 6,500 millipede species identified worldwide. At least 600 of those are found in North America. Millipedes have four legs per segment (centipedes have two), except the head and tail segments which have two legs each. Millipedes have rounded bodies where as centipedes have flat bodies.

Millipedes breathe through holes called spiracles that are located along their body. They can't close these breathing holes, so if their environment is too wet they can easily drown. They can smell and taste with all parts of their bodies which is typical of arthropods. They have no eyes, so they use their antennae to feel their way around. Millipedes, unlike centipedes, can't bite humans – they have weak jaws that allow them to eat decaying fruit and leaves.

