

Dear Editor,

It is always a pleasure to read about people's achievements in keeping, breeding and other aspects of our hobby. We readily share the information about our

successes, but rarely talk about our failures. However, it is often the failures that teach us more, not less, than the successes in something.

I'm not particularly proud to share my negative experience with anybody, but on this occasion I feel it may serve as a warning to other people taking care of certainly one of my favourite tarantulas – *Megaphobema robustum*.

It is reasonably well-known that many tarantulas (and especially representatives of the genus *Megaphobema*) possess large spines on the hind legs and especially on leg IV. These tarantulas use spines to rake the urticating hairs from their abdomens at their enemies (a common strategy in Theraphosinae), but they also defend themselves in another way – by hitting their enemy with the hind legs armoured with these spines. This behavioural characteristic can be seen primarily in the representatives of the genus *Megaphobema* and most clearly in *M. robustum* as the largest species. This behaviour is demonstrated by juvenile, sub-adult and adult tarantulas respectively.

This giant tarantula is generally considered to be very shy and nervous and it takes every opportunity to defend itself if it is disturbed (but rarely uses its huge, strong fangs to bite). The spines start to develop from the spiderling stage and become bigger and more noticeable with each moult.

This is a very effective mechanism for a tarantula to defend itself against small mammals and possibly other natural predators, but it played an important role in my case which is why I have decided to share this with you.

One day, my beautiful female *M. robustum* moulted again and, because she had attained a reasonable size, I wanted to take some nice photographs of her freshly moulted, stunning colours. Several hours after the female moulted and had turned herself back over I switched on my camera and opened the lid of her terrarium. She was very beautiful and I was extremely happy that one of the spiderlings I had obtained had become such a gorgeous female (two others were males). Suddenly she rubbed her un-hardened abdomen with one of the heavily spined legs and I felt a feeling of horror as I notice a large haemolymph patch starting to grow bigger and bigger in a matter of seconds...

There are no words to describe how I felt – I just never expected such a thing to happen!

After a while I noticed that the flow of haemolymph seemed to slow down and there did not seem to have been too much lost. I added extra water to the substrate in case the tarantula needed to compensate for the lost fluid and left her alone. I kept a close eye on her, ensuring that she was not disturbed at all.

By the time several days had passed she was looking as if she had totally recovered. Unfortunately, a few days after that, I found her dead. All my dreams of raising her from a tiny spiderling to be the pearl of my collection were now gone.

I am really sorry for what had happened and I realize that it was mostly my fault that she died. This is therefore to warn every *Megaphobema robustum* owner not to do the same under any circumstances!!!

If you want to observe your growing beauty alive and healthy, do not disturb **any** of your tarantulas for at least 3-4 days after the moult is completed – simply wait until the external integument has hardened!

Good luck,
Mikhail Bagaturov