

# Pandinopsis dictator

## THE DICTATOR SCORPION

### Species Report:

Pandinopsis dictator:

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## Taxonomy and Classification

**Pandinopsis dictator** (common name: Dictator Scorpion) is a large scorpion in the family Scorpionidae. It was originally described in 1888 by Reginald Innes Pocock as *Scorpio dictator*, based on a specimen from Fernando Po (Bioko Island, Equatorial Guinea).

It was later placed in the genus *Pandinus* (alongside the Emperor Scorpion *Pandinus imperator*) but has since been reassigned to its own monotypic genus *Pandinopsis*. In a recent taxonomic revision (Prendini & Loria 2020), *Pandinopsis* (formerly a subgenus) was elevated to full genus rank, and *Pandinus dictator* was formally renamed *Pandinopsis dictator*.

The full classification is:

**Kingdom** Animalia;

**Phylum** Arthropoda;

**Class** Arachnida;

**Order** Scorpiones;

**Family** Scorpionidae;

**Subfamily** Pandininae;

**Genus** *Pandinopsis*;

**Species** *P. dictator*.

This species has no subspecies and is the sole member of *Pandinopsis*. Synonyms in older literature include *Scorpio dictator* and *Pandinus dictator*.

## Morphological Characteristics

*Pandinopsis dictatoris* is among the largest scorpions in the world, with adult females reaching up to 18 cm (7 inches) in length. It is a robust, dark-colored scorpion, typically uniformly blackish-brown to jet black in overall coloration. The chelae are large and round, while the metasoma (tail) is comparatively thick with a relatively small stinger. Notably, *P. dictator* can be distinguished from the Emperor Scorpion (*Pandinus imperator*) and other related species by several key morphological features.

1. The carapace (dorsal head shield) of *P. dictatoris* is heavily granulated, whereas *P. imperator's* carapace is more weakly granulated.
2. *P. dictator* has fewer pectinal teeth on the underside (typically 12–15 teeth) compared to *P. imperator* (15–19 teeth).
3. The most definitive diagnostic trait is the trichobothria (sensory bristles) count on the chelae:
  - *P. dictator* has **2 internal and 4 ventral** trichobothria on each pedipalp chela
  - *P. imperator* has **3 internal and 9–14 ventral** trichobothria

This difference in trichobothria is a critical identification feature



*Pandinopsis dictator*



*Pandinus imperator*

4. Additionally, the last sternite (ventral plate) of *P. dictatoris* is granulated, unlike the smooth sternites of *P. imperator*.

In overall appearance, the Dictator Scorpion is stocky with very large claws and a glossy black exoskeleton. Under ultraviolet light (as with all scorpions), it fluoresces a bluish-green; keepers have noted *P. dictator* exhibits a particularly deep green-blue glow under UV, similar to other Scorpionidae.

## **Pandinopsis dictator**

Dictator Scorpion



## **Pandinus imperator**

Emperor Scorpion



## Natural Habitat and Geographic Distribution

The Dictator Scorpion is native to the tropical forests of Central West Africa. Confirmed range countries include Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea (including Bioko Island), Gabon, and the Republic of the Congo. Within this region it appears to occupy the humid lowland rainforest belt, in fact, early researchers noted that *P. dictator* "replaces *P. imperator* in Cameroon" (i.e. in Cameroon's forests *P. imperator* is absent and *P. dictator* is the dominant large scorpion).

It inhabits warm, humid environments such as primary rainforests, secondary woodlands, and gallery forests near rivers. Field records indicate *P. dictator* is found in rainforest leaf litter and soil; for example, specimens have been collected in southern Cameroon and coastal Gabon in dense tropical forest habitat. The microhabitat of *P. dictator* is typically on or below the forest floor, they are a fossorial (burrowing) species that will dig burrows or use natural crevices under logs, rocks, and thick leaf litter for shelter. Like many Scorpionidae, they prefer soft, loamy or sandy-loam soil that retains moisture for burrowing. In areas where the soil is too waterlogged, they may simply hide under surface cover rather than excavate deep burrows.

The species is adapted to the stable, warm temperatures of equatorial Africa and is not found outside this humid tropical zone. (Notably, historical reports of *P. imperator* in some Central African locales were likely misidentifications of *P. dictator*. There are no records of *P. dictator* natura

