

Calling All Spiders!



David Roberts/Photo
Researchers

Tarantulas are found in warm regions, including the southwestern United States.

Does thinking about spiders and their hairy bodies, long legs, and sticky webs make your skin crawl? Many people shiver at the thought of spiders.

That is not the case for Rich Bradley, a real-life Spider-Man. He can't get enough of the creepy crawlers. Bradley is an **arachnologist** (ah-rak-NAH-luh-jist). That is a scientist who studies spiders. Bradley has spent the last 10 years identifying and studying spiders in his home state of Ohio.

Spider Seekers

So far, Bradley has uncovered 583 **species**, or types, of spiders living in the Buckeye State. He and his team of volunteers have a sharp eye when it comes to collecting the creatures indoors and outdoors. "They move really fast," he told *Weekly Reader*.

Scientists say about 3,500 species of spiders live in North America, and nearly 35,000 live worldwide. Spiders live in different places, including gardens, water, deserts, and caves.

Hairy Hunters

Many people think spiders are insects, but they are actually **arachnids** (ah-RAK-nidz). Ticks and scorpions are also arachnids.

Along with fangs and eight hairy legs, a spider has two body parts--a head and an abdomen. The abdomen contains **spinnerets**, organs that produce silk. A spider uses its silk for many purposes, including weaving webs, protecting its eggs, and catching food.



Damon Hart-Davis/[DHD Multimedia Gallery](#)

A spider uses its silk to weave a web.

Spiders are **predators**, or hunters that eat other animals. They dine mostly on insects. Some larger spiders also eat lizards, frogs, and even snakes.

To capture their food, some spiders spin webs. Other types of spiders chase down their **prey**. The **venom**, or poison, from their fangs helps paralyze their food.

Fear Factor

Although the hairy creatures spook many people, there isn't much reason to be afraid of spiders. "Most spiders are not very dangerous," said Bradley.

In fact, most are timid creatures that are unable to give humans more than a harmless bite. Although spider venom is deadly to insects, it often has little effect on humans because of our larger size.

Myth-Conceptions

Spiders may have a bad reputation for being scary, but they are important to us. Bradley hopes his work shatters some **myths** about spiders. (A myth is a false idea that many people believe is true.)

Spiders eat mosquitoes and other insects that harm farmers' crops and carry diseases. Bradley's research is teaching scientists more about how spiders help control **ecosystems**, or communities of plants and animals. If spiders didn't exist, there would be a lot more insects!

"Spiders are your friends," Bradley said. "They make our life more pleasant."

Spider Mania

Get caught up on some different types of spiders. Spiders come in all shapes and sizes. Crab spiders, jumping spiders, and orb weavers have made Rich Bradley's Ohio count. Find out more about them and other spiders.

☐ Crab Spider

Can you guess how this spider got its name? It may not live in the ocean, but it looks like a crab. The crab spider lives on flowers. It can match its body color to the flower's color. That allows it to sneak up on insects.

☐ Jumping Spider

What a leap! The jumping spider can jump between 10 and 40 inches. To catch an insect, this hunting spider sneaks up on its prey and pounces.

☐ Trapdoor Spider

The trapdoor spider lives in a tunnel. The spider, common in the southwestern United States, lines the tunnel with silk and fashions a door made of silk and dirt. It peeks out of the slightly open door and grabs passing insects.

☐ Tarantula

The tarantula is a large, hairy spider found mainly in warm regions, including the southwestern United States. Although the tarantula's bite is painful, it is not very poisonous to humans. Tarantulas hunt insects, lizards, mice, toads, and frogs.

☐ Orb-Weaving Spider

E. B. White's famous spider Charlotte was an orb weaver. The orb-weaving spider spins a wheel-shaped web. When an insect flies into the web, the spider races toward its meal.