

FIRST RECORD OF RED-BACK SPIDER *LATRODECTUS SCELIO*
THORELL, 1870 (ARANEAE:THERIDIIDAE) IN BAGHDAD, IRAQ

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ABSTRACT

Two females of the red-back spider, *Latrodectus scelio* Thorell, 1870 were first recorded in Iraq, short description with figure was provided

INTRODUCTION

About 40,000 spiders have been recognized in the world and this is less than half of the expected number of 100,000 to 200,000 species. Most of the species have not yet been described (Ellis et al. 2005). Widow spiders of the genus *Latrodectus* are found worldwide (Graudins et al. 2001). Red-back spiders, *L.(= hasselti) scelio* Thorell, are widow spiders (Stallybrass, 1969) and are the most medically importance spiders all over the world, and certainly in Australia (Clark et al. 1992; Vetter and Visscher, 1998; Isbister and Gray, 2002).

The dangerous red-back, *L. scelio*, belongs to Theridiidae family and these spiders are famous for having neurotoxin venom. Its bite is usually mild and frequently may not be felt. Symptoms may arise up to an hour after biting and start as a reddish lump with red streaks publishing out from it. Typical envenomations of red-backed spider being the most toxic cases of all the member of the genus *Latrodectus* and only the female bite is dangerous. The venom affects directly on the nerves, causing in release and consequently depletion of neurotransmitters (Cariaso, 1967); Red-back spiders are most commonly found in urban areas, preferring the shelter human habitats provide from unfavorable weather. They inhabit urban and suburban areas, preferring tropical and temperate areas. They are less common in savanna, chaparral and desert areas and are not found at the continent's highest elevations. The appearance of red-backs in Japan shows that they are also capable of surviving at very low temperatures (-3 degrees C). (Nihei et al., 2003; Vink et al., 2010).

Red-back spiders are bilaterally symmetrical, cold-blooded spiders belonging to the family Theridiidae. Their closest relative is the North American southern black widow spider (*Latrodectus mactans*), which is distinguishable from red-back spiders by the absence of a red dorsal stripe. Female red-backs average 10 mm in length, with body sizes as large as a pea, and are significantly larger than males (which average 3-4 mm). Females are typically black with a red stripe, sometimes broken, on the dorsal surface of the upper abdomen (crossing parallel to the length of the body), and a red hourglass-shaped spot on the ventral side of the abdomen. Young female red-backs have additional white markings on their abdomens that they lose as adults. Male red-backs are typically light brown in color with a dorsal red stripe and a paler hourglass shape on the ventral side of the abdomen, both of which are similar to, but less distinct than, female markings. Males also retain the white markings on the upper side of the abdomen through adulthood. Each sex has slender legs and is venomous. (Garb et al., 2004; Vink et al., 2010).

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MATERIALS AND METHODS

We obtained two Adult females in this investigation; the first specimen collected in 3rd April 2012 hiding under a bee hive in a farm that is about 13 Km, south east to Baghdad center, 135m away from Diyala river before it meets Tigris river with 14 Km. The area called (Diyala New Bridge) The second specimen collected in 17 December 2012 from Tarmiya, Al-Farouk Quarter (residential area) about 45 Km North west of Baghdad center.

The first specimen was brought to plant protection department at the college of Agriculture, Baghdad University, by a small bee queen cage, then put in a glass plate with a wet piece of cotton that was covered by a fresh cucumber leaf (replaced daily) with aphids and mites on it for feeding the spider which was noticed later.

Seven days later, a yellowish white sac was seen under silk tissue, and then abdomen became small in size with less feeding during guarding the sac and touching it with its legs.

On the 6th May, the sac was opened from a tiny hole at the tip and 250-300 individuals were released so the plate was transferred to a 30×30×24 cm. glass cage covered with same kind of tissue and same procedures for feeding and humidity were conducted.

The second specimen put in 70% alcohol and kept at Iraq Natural History Research Center and Museum.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The female is easily recognizable by her black body with a prominent red stripe on the upper surface of abdomen It is about 1 centimeter in length (Fig.1).

The female red-back has a round body about the size of a large pea, with long, slender legs, body is a deep black colour, often containing an obvious orange to red longitudinal stripe on the upper surface of abdomen, and has a body about the size of a large pea and slender legs.

Widow spiders of the genus *Latrodectus* have worldwide distribution (Graudins *et al.* 2001). Red-back spiders, *L. scelio*, are widow spiders (Stallybrass, 1969).

Generally; for the first time in Iraq, two females of red-back spider were found in Baghdad City. The presence of *L. scelio* in Baghdad, and its possible spread to other provinces, is of human health significance, and the species may also impact on native biodiversity.

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Figure (1) female of *Latrodectus scelio* Thorell

تسجيل جديد لعنكبوت الارمله السوداء *LATRODECTUS SCELIO* THORELL, 1870 (ARANEAE: THERIDIIDAE) في بغداد-العراق

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الخلاصة

تسجيل جديد لأنثى عنكبوت الارمله السوداء, *Latrodectus scelio* Thorell, 1870 كما تم وصفها موضعاً بالصورة.