



## HOUSE SAC SPIDERS

House sac spiders (English); huis sakspinnekoppe (Afrikaans); isakandlu sicabucabu (isiZulu)

**Eutichuridae** (*Cheiracanthium furculatum*)

### DESCRIPTION

**Size:** total length of female 7-12 mm, male 5-11 mm.

**Colour** of both sexes similar with carapace is yellow to fawn (Fig. 2); darker around eye region as well as the chelicera (Fig. 1); abdomen is yellow to olive green usually with distinct heart-mark (Fig. 2), but without other markings; legs are yellow to fawn. Male's abdomen has markings similar to female's. **Carapace:** eyes in two rows; the fovea indistinct; chelicerae long with strong fangs (Fig. 1). **Legs:** two-clawed; leg I is longer than IV (Fig. 3) and all the femora are without dorsal setae. **Abdomen:** oval with dense layer of pale setae (Fig. 4). In the males the body is more slender but the legs much longer

### HABITAT

The sac spiders are commonly found in the fields. They are free-living plant dwellers. However, *C. furculatum* is an exception as they are regularly found in houses where they make their sac-like retreats in dark areas. They frequently make use of fabric in clothing, curtains, bedding and tablecloths to make their retreats in the folds.

### BEHAVIOUR

They are free-living spiders that are active at night when they move around in search of prey. They can then easily become entangled in bedding where they might deliver a bite when threatened. During the day they hide in a soft sac-like retreat that can easily be seen in the folds of fabric. After mating the female will enclose herself with the egg sac in such a retreat.

### DISTRIBUTION

This species occurs widely throughout southern Africa (Fig. 5).

### MEDICAL IMPORTANCE

They produce a cytotoxic venom that affects the tissue around the bite. Considerable tissue damage can ensue and lesions of up to 10 cm in diameter may develop. The symptoms develop gradually and often the person is unaware that he has been bitten until the area around the bite becomes painful. The majority of the bites are self-limiting and heal spontaneously. Treatment of the bites should be directed at preventing and treating secondary infection using local antiseptics and systemic antibiotics. Occasionally an infected wound may develop into rapidly spreading cellulitis, which requires aggressive antibiotic therapy. No anti-venom available. All *Cheiracanthium* spp. must be treated with care.

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