



COMMON BLACK BUTTON SPIDERS

Common black button spiders; Gauteng black button spiders (English);
Gautengse swart knopiespinnekoppe (Afrikaans)

THERIDIIDAE (*Latrodectus renivulvatus*)

DESCRIPTION

Size: total length female 10-11 mm; male 4-5 mm.

Colour: Female: colour of the abdomen is pitch black with varying colour patterns consisting of transverse bands (Fig. 1), to a single longitudinal band in more mature specimens (Fig. 2). Ventrally the abdomen is without markings (Fig. 3); legs are dark (Fig. 2). **Carapace:** longer than wide; **eyes:** 8 arranged in 2 evenly spaced rows; **abdomen:** globular in shape and the legs are moderately long and slender with the third pair being the shortest, with no or few spines. The tarsi are usually tapering, and tarsus IV with the typical row of slightly curved, serrated setae forming a comb. There is sexual dimorphism in size with male much smaller and more brightly coloured.

HABITAT

Not common in built-up areas. Usually found under debris in the field with a retreat web low and close to the ground.

BEHAVIOUR

They construct retreat webs under soil debris in a variety of microhabitats. There is a funnel-shaped retreat to the one side with strong supporting lines anchoring the web. Some resistance is felt when one touches them. The spiders make use of the same web over a long period of time and the small male is found on the border of the web of the female. This species can easily be recognized by egg sacs which are smooth and round (Fig. 4). They live for about one year and prey on a wide range of flying and crawling insects.

DISTRIBUTION

More common in the central regions of the country.

MEDICAL IMPORTANCE

They produce a neurotoxic venom that can affect the nervous system. **Symptoms include:** a burning pain at bite site; generalised muscle pain and cramps; abdominal pain and cramps; limb pain, especially thigh muscles; abdominal muscles rigid; cramps and pain in back muscles; weakness in legs, with difficulty in walking; a feeling of constriction of chest muscles; tender regional lymph node; sometimes headache; patient usually restless, agitated and anxious; profuse sweating (common); raised blood pressure (common); often swelling of face and especially eyelids; bite site evident in 70% of cases. **Treatment:** hospitalise and monitor vital functions [24 hours]; administration of antivenom the only effective treatment for severe latrodectism and if not treated state of envenomation can be drawn out for a week or longer; administer antivenom (10 ml) intravenously; use of histamines not recommended except when given to lessen effects of possible allergic reactions; the bite may occasionally become infected.

Compiled by: Ansie Dippenaar-Schoeman and Robin Lyle
ARC-Plant Protection Research Institute

Contact: LyleR@arc.agric.za

Website: www.arc.agric.za

SANSA—South African National Survey of Arachnida

