

Western black widow packs powerful bite

There are approximately 37,000 species of spiders on earth. Nearly every spider you see is poisonous because they all have fangs and venom.

The good news is that only a handful of them have venom that is harmful to humans.

The most common species of spider in Colorado with venom that is harmful to humans is the western black widow spider, or *Latrodectus Hesperus*.

Another spider we hear a great deal about is the brown recluse or *Loxosceles reclusa*. Single specimens do occasionally turn up but natural populations are not found here in Colorado.

The female of the western black widow spider are generally round in form with a bulbous abdomen, reaching a length of one-third of an inch. They are a very distinctive shiny black or very dark brown in color.

The female has venom that is 15 times more toxic than that of a prairie rattlesnake. Only the female is toxic to humans; the male is harmless.

The most distinctive feature of all widows is the reddish-orange hourglass on the underside of the abdomen. The pattern may appear as two unconnected spots and may fade in color, depending on the age of the spider.

The male of the western black widow spider is usually half the size of the female. They are a light brown or gray in color with bands



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

across their body. The male usually has the hourglass underneath but the color is a more orange or yellow.

There is an old myth that a female widow will always eat the male after mating. This is not true. A female that is not particularly hungry will usually let the male leave. Occasionally, a female will eat the male since he is so much smaller but this is true with most species of spiders.

If a western black widow spider ever bites you, it is very unlikely that you are going to die. The venom is a neurotoxin that can cause excruciating pain in the limbs, tightening of the stomach muscles, facial contortions and sweating. You may also experience nausea, dizziness, chest pains and respiratory distress.

In the event a western black widow spider bites you, the first aid measures you should take are as follows:

- Wash the bite site with soap and water.
- Apply an ice pack over the



A female black widow spider, top, packs a vicious bite. (Submitted photo)

bite location to help control the swelling.

- If the bite is on a limb, elevate to help prevent swelling.
- Seek emergency medical attention as soon as possible.
- Try to collect the spider in a jar or plastic bag for proper identification by an expert, even if you have crushed it.

• If the symptoms become severe, such as difficulty breathing or convulsions, contact 911 immediately and prepare patient for evacuation.

Early treatment is especially important for young children and elderly people. A physician will determine the

severity of the bite and may prescribe antivenin.

Persons with a heart condition or other health problems may require a hospital stay.

There are a few things you can do while outdoors that will help prevent spiders from biting you.

- Check your equipment to make sure you don't carry spiders with you. If you store packs, tents, sleeping bags and other equipment in the garage or basement, you may have spiders living in them. Shake out all your gear before you go.

- Spray a bug repellent around the perimeter of your tent, as well as the seating area of your campsite.

- Shake out your clothes and boots before you put them on to rid them of anything that may have entered during the night.

- Be cautious of where you place your hands when reaching for things, especially in dark crevices or other places spiders may live. Always look before you reach.

Fortunately, black widow spiders are not aggressive and will usually leave you alone unless you are near their nest. Being aware while outdoors is the best prevention. Until next time, see you on the trail.

Mark Rackay is a freelance writer who serves as a director for the Montrose County Sheriff's Posse. For information about the posse call 970-252-4033 (leave a message) or email info@mcspi.org.

Browning evergreens not cause for alarm

FROM STAFF REPORTS

Seeing orange and brown on the evergreens? That's not necessarily cause for alarm, according to the Colorado State Forest Service, which says most of the trees are going through a natural shedding process, not an attack by bark beetles of disease.

Colorado evergreens shed their older, interior needles as part of an annual growth cycle, according to an agency news release.

The news release explained that needles on the lower portion of the crowns or closest to the trunk are most commonly shed, but trees stressed due to drought or root damage may shed more needles to keep the tree in balance with its root system.

Soon-to-be shed needles typically turn yellow or orange first, then a reddish or brown color before dropping off.

In Gunnison and Hinsdale counties, which are served by the Colorado State Forest Service Gunnison Field Office, lodgepole pine, Engelmann spruce, Douglas fir, subalpine fir and blue spruce are the tree species that most commonly shed needles in September and October.

Evergreen trees that shed fall needles have a different appearance than trees infested by bark beetles. The needles on a beetle-infested tree typically change color throughout the entire tree, initially starting with an off-shade of green and turning to reddish-orange by the following summer.

In addition to changing needle color, bark beetle-infested trees will show other signs of attack, such as fine sawdust at the base of the tree and popcorn-shaped masses of resin on the trunk.

This fall needle drop is frequently mislabeled as "needle cast," but the term actually refers to a fungal disease of spruce and fir trees.



In this Tuesday, Aug. 23, 2016 photo, Kaeli Roman, right, and Louis Browning, skilled masons who work for Rocky Mountain National Park, Colo., replace one rock at a time on a historic wall the Civilian Conservation Corps built by hand about 70 years ago. This summer, he and Browning have teamed up on a 150-foot stretch of wall along Trail Ridge Road, an area that overlooks the Never Summer Range, the Kawuneeche Valley and the headwaters of the Colorado River. (Pamela Johnson/Loveland Daily Reporter-Herald via AP)

Crew rebuilds stone walls at Trail Ridge Road rock by rock

ROCKY MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK (AP) — With steady hands and a mountain of patience, skilled masons Kaeli Roman and Louis Browning are excavating and repairing historic stone walls built by hand in the 1930s and 1940s in Rocky Mountain National Park.

You might also describe the men as unofficial archaeologists and historic preservationists, unearthing rock work that is almost buried and intricately rebuilding it stone by stone.

"It's a way for us to physically be a part of history," said Roman, a mason who has been repairing stretches of rock wall every summer for 16 years.

This summer, he and Browning have teamed up on a 150-foot stretch of wall along Trail Ridge Road, an area that overlooks the Never Summer Range, the

Kawuneeche Valley and the headwaters of the Colorado River.

"It's not a bad office," said Roman, though the work is physical as well as mental, painstaking, meticulous and, according to both on the team, very rewarding.

Each year, they complete one section of the more than 2,000 feet of stone wall that stretch throughout Rocky Mountain National Park, most of it untouched in the seven decades since it was originally placed.

"Every rock was shaped by hand," said Roman, showing how the different sizes of rocks fit together almost like a puzzle.

"We reuse every single rock, and we put it back where it was."

Rock walls were built throughout Rocky Mountain National Park in the 1930s and 1940s, many of them by Civilian Conservation Corps work crews.

That program was established in 1933 under Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal to create jobs for young men during the Great Depression, employing about 3 million men during its nine-year tenure.

These work crews traveled the country for nearly a decade performing manual labor, particularly jobs related to conservation of federal and state natural lands, and making about \$30 per month. Congress shut down the program in 1942 with World War II and the draft underway.

These labor crews completed several projects in Larimer County and in Rocky Mountain National Park, including construction of some but not all of the rock walls. Many had already been started earlier in the 1930s, according to information from the national park.



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