

Eight-legged attackers



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

I had a recent encounter with a black widow spider. We have an outdoor kitchen, and occasionally, I have to get under the cabinets and work on the plumbing. While under the sink, up to my elbows in the cabinet and pipes, I felt I was being watched. Upon closer inspection, it was just a black widow spider.

Not having anything against the temporary resident, I left him alone. I didn't report the trespasser to my wife of many years because she would have instantly sentenced the spider to death, without mercy from the court. It is difficult to imagine how something so small can send normal people into a fear frenzy.

While I was doing some research for this column, I read that black widows, along with most spiders are not aggressive. Most will only bite if they are handled or crushed. I guess if a stranger handled or crushed me, I would get pretty aggressive too. I'm not sure what an

aggressive spider does, or how you could even tell if something so small was being aggressive. Perhaps he pulls a knife on you.

Of the 37,000 species of spiders on earth, only 400 species call Colorado home. That's 400 too many according to my wife. 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.

There are a handful of spiders here that can potentially pose a threat to humans. One we hear about often is the brown recluse or *Loxosceles reclusa* as he goes by on the streets. Single specimens do occasionally turn up, but natural populations are not found here in Colorado. People usually bring them home in their luggage unknowingly, when returning from places he lives. Like me, the recluse does not like cold weather, so he seeks his entertainment in warmer climates.

Newcomers can also bring the brown recluse here with their belongings. Since these spiders love to nest in clothing, gloves, and fabric, and their fangs can penetrate said items, you could get a welcome to Colorado bite.

Another spider you probably don't want to spend much time with is the hobo spider. They can cause necrosis, just like the brown recluse, but usually not as severe. Bites are



This black widow has taken up residence under our outdoor kitchen sink cabinet, but don't tell my wife. (Photo/Mark Rackay)

not known to be fatal, and half the bites produce no symptoms at all.

The possible symptoms of a hobo spider are similar to those of the brown recluse bite, and include headaches, blisters, and a lesion at the scene of the bite that can take months to heal. They are considered somewhat aggressive, so be careful that a cornered hobo doesn't pull a knife on you.

Tarantulas are another spider that makes his home amongst us here. The Colorado tarantula can be found in the phone book as *Aphonopelma coloradanum* and is fairly common. While he looks intimidating, and can deliver a painful but not deadly bite, he is actually quite friendly and can be handled gently.

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 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, who 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.

The first aid treatment for a bite from a western black widow is similar to most spider bites:

- Wash the bite site with soap and water.
- Apply an ice pack over the bite location to help control the swelling.

- If the bite is on a limb, elevate to help prevent swelling.
- 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.

Early treatment is especially important for young children and elderly people. A physician will determine the severity of the bite and may prescribe anti-venom. Persons with a heart condition or other health problems may require a hospital stay.

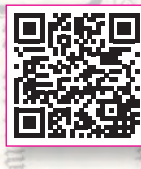
Fortunately, black widow spiders are not aggressive and will probably not come after you with a knife. My wife, on the other hand, is very aggressive. When she comes across an 8-legged creature, she sometimes goes to hand-to-hand combat. Usually, she just calls me to relocate the interloper.

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2	7
3	8
4	5
5	7
6	7
7	7
8	6
9	6
10	6
11	4
12	6
13	6
14	8
15	8
16	6
17	8
18	8
19	8
20	2
21	8
22	7
23	7
24	7

CLIMB

FROM PAGE B1

until dark, and climbers are asked to register and sign a waiver in advance as spots often fill up. They must also bring their own harness, helmet and climbing shoes, as well as a belay device if possible. A small climbing background is helpful as well, including basic knowledge of how to top-rope belay and tie a figure 8 knot.

But, Rutledge encourages people to reach out to Mountain Trip if they don't quite have everything.

"We don't want someone's lack of a climbing harness to get in the way of them joining us," he said.

Participants will meet at a designated parking area for each clinic, and the events will begin with a safety talk and briefing on the topic of the day, during which participants are welcome to ask questions. Then, the group will hike to the crag (if necessary) and get rolling.

Typically, Rutledge noted, guides set anchors beforehand so "when we arrive at the base of the wall, we'll be able to get climbing and dive right in."

Clinics will combine technical instruction with climbing time, which Rutledge believes is the perfect "brain break."

He notes as the owner of a guide service, it's part of his duty to help people access the kinds of activities he, and perhaps many more seasoned athletes, take for granted. He also noted Arc'teryx has been a vital sponsor of the free clinic program, adding,

Each clinic runs from 4 p.m. until dark, and climbers must register in advance. (Courtesy Photo/Marcus Bailando)

"I'm very grateful to them for their support, and their support allows us to do this."

With each clinic running until dark, he said, he wants clients to come away feeling like they've learned something, not like they were on the clock.

"We're out with guides, but really we're out with

just super knowledgeable new friends and climbing partners," he said.

Climbers can follow Mountain Trip on Facebook and Instagram, and subscribe to email newsletters for information about each clinic.

More information: mountaintrip.com or facebook.com/mountaintrip

A climber scaling The Dark Side wall in Ophir during a 2024 clinic. (Courtesy Photo/Morgan Bradley)