

## ***What you may find on your bushwalk - Spiders***

Spiders can be divided into two major groups, the mygalomorphs (including the trapdoor spiders and funnel-webs) and the araneomorphs (the majority of commonly-seen spiders including red-backs, orb-weavers, huntsmen spiders). Spiders have evolved to be more energy efficient by staying in one place, some spinning webs.

Three types of web-building spiders that you are most likely to see are:

**Golden Orb-weaver** (*Nephila edulis*) – the large-bodied female is often seen in a large permanent orb-web. The male is usually considerably smaller than the female and can be seen at the edge of the web. These spiders construct an extensive web consisting of the central capture-web of sticky silk and a scaffold of strands to the front and rear of the capture web which act as an early-warning system for potential predators. The resident will drop from the web onto the ground or climb onto nearby vegetation if threatened.



**Female golden orb-weaver spider**

**Leaf-curling spider** (*Phonognatha* spp.) – these spiders construct an orb-web of sticky silk and pull a leaf into the centre. The spider uses silk to roll the edges of the leaf into a tube in which the spider hides. The resident places the tips of the front legs on the orb-web strands to detect insect prey struggling in the web. The leaf is protection from predators such as birds and allows the spider to remain in the web during daylight and quickly access prey caught in the web.



**Leaf-curling spider commonly seen in jarrah forest**

**Christmas (Jewel or Spiny) spider** (*Austracantha minax*) – the females are colourful semi-communal spiders found in orb-webs across the country. Males are smaller and are black and white patterned.



**The colourful Christmas spider**

Commonly encountered free-ranging spiders are:

**Wolf spiders** (*Lycosa* spp. and other genera) – very common ground-dwelling spiders. Their eyes reflect your head torch light. Try a night walk and you will see how common they are.



**The common Wolf Spider**

**Huntsman** (Sparassidae family – approx. 150 species in Australia) – large, hairy spiders that live under bark in the bush and can wander into homes (including tents). Because they can inhabit fallen logs or dead tree branches, encounters with these spiders when camping are not uncommon. Bites can ensue if the spider is roughly handled or accidentally squashed. The bite is locally painful, of short duration and on rare occasions dizziness and headache have been recorded.



**A Huntsman Spider**

The **Red-headed Trapdoors** (*Missulena* spp.) are widespread in southern W.A. The males are readily identifiable by sometimes having bright red fang bases and/or red on the front half of the cephalothorax (fused head and thorax).

The males vacate their burrow in the winter months to search out females (that remain in their burrow). Unusually for trapdoor spiders, red-headed trapdoor spider males will wander during daylight.

Although these spiders rear-up when disturbed, actual bites are extremely rare. These spiders are not aggressive as are the funnel-webs of eastern Australia and will bluff their way to escape.



**Male Red-headed Trapdoor spider**

Also look out for **Peacock Spiders** (*Maratus pavonis* and other species) – the colourful males provide a stunning dance performance for the female. These spiders tend to be seen near the ground, on leaf litter but are only 4-5 mm long, so easily overlooked.



**One form of a male Peacock Spider**

Of interest:

- The only potentially dangerous spider in W.A. is the **Red-back**. These spiders are usually encountered in out-buildings, rubbish etc. but can establish webs on verandas and patios, amongst garden and picnic site furniture and generally any hot, dry exposed habitat.
- The much-maligned **White-tailed spider** is a native spider in W.A. It is often found inside our homes although prefers to live under loose tree bark where it preys on other spiders. It is rarely encountered when bush-walking. Bites from white-tailed spiders are rarely felt. Local numbness at the bite site can occur and sometimes an itchy welt develops which can be very painful. There is no evidence of bites from these spiders developing into a necrotic injury, as often reported by the media.
- There are no Funnel-web spiders in Western Australia, but there are a number of native mygalomorph spiders that have a superficial resemblance to funnel-webs.

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