



Wolf Spiders and Nursery Web Spiders

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Introduction

Wolf spiders belong to the spider family Lycosidae and nursery web spiders belong to the family Pisauridae; both families are in the order Araneae. Wolf spiders and nursery web spiders are native to North America. These spiders wander in search of prey rather than spinning a web to capture their food. Like all spiders, wolf spiders and nursery web spiders use their venom to kill their prey, but they are not considered to be medically-important species in Virginia.

Description

Wolf spiders are usually robust, hairy spiders that are not associated with webs. They are ambush predators and have excellent eyesight for searching for their prey. Their color ranges from tan to dark brown and they often have stripes running the length of the body.



Figure 1. Wolf spider (Johnny N. Dell, Bugwood.org).

Nursery web spiders are also ambush predators and their coloration probably serves to camouflage them in the environment. They occur in shades of brown, sometimes with strong patterns of stripes on the

body or banding on the legs. Other nursery web spiders are more evenly colored (Fig. 2).



Figure 2. A female nursery web spider carrying her egg sac (Sturgis McKeever, Georgia Southern University, Bugwood.org).

The fishing spiders (*Dolomedes* spp.) are a genus of spiders in the family Pisauridae; they are some of the largest spiders found in Virginia. They are up to 3 inches in length, but appear to be much bigger when seen with their legs fully spread (Fig. 3).

Habitat

Wolf spiders can be found around doors, windows, houseplants, basements, and garages. They are commonly found indoors in the fall when they are looking for a warm place for winter. Outdoors, wolf spiders are typically found on the ground, looking for insect prey.

Nursery web spiders are typically found off the ground, on the foliage in tall grass, meadows, wooded areas, and in gardens. They occasionally wander into houses or climb on outside walls. The large fishing spiders are primarily found near water or in moist wooded areas. They feed mostly on insects, but some species feed on very small

freshwater fish or tadpoles, thus their common name.



Figure 3. A fishing spider, a type of nursery web spider (Mohammed El Damir, Bugwood.org).

Life Cycle

All spiders have a life cycle of egg, immature spiderling, and adult stages. Spiders lay eggs in a silken egg sac. Both wolf spiders and nursery web spiders care for their young. Female wolf spiders carry their egg sac with them using appendages at the tip of their abdomen, while female nursery web spiders carry their egg sac in their jaws (Fig. 2). When the eggs are about to hatch, a female nursery web spider spins a small silken tent, places her egg sac in it (thus the common name of “nursery web spider”), and remains to guard her young spiderlings. Very young wolf spiderlings may ride on the back of their mothers before dispersing into the environment. Most wolf and nursery web spiders probably live for about a year, maybe longer for the females.

Distribution

Both wolf spiders and nursery web spiders are common in Virginia and can be found throughout much of the United States.

Damage

It’s best to leave spiders alone and not handle them. As predators, all spiders can bite. However, neither wolf spiders or fishing spiders are considered particularly venomous or medically important. Spiders are important beneficial arthropods in the environment, eating many insects and other arthropods.

Control

A general spray for spiders is not recommended unless the infestation seems severe. Use a fly swatter or spot spray individual spiders with an aerosol insecticide if you find them objectionable. Individual spiders found indoors can also be moved and released outside. Check seals on windows and doors to make sure there are no gaps where spiders may enter homes and buildings.

Revised

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