



## Animals of the World: Arachnids



# THE BLACK WIDOW

The black widow spider belongs to the class of arachnids. This is one of the 50,000 types of spiders that exist in the world. It is a species that is reputed to be among the most dangerous because it has very large venom glands. Something curious about this type of spiders is that most of the time, it is the females that bite humans. Males are said to hardly ever bite, but they have been known to do so from time to time.

Females differ greatly from males. They are larger and can measure up to 50mm with their legs extended. They are glossy black and have an hourglass-shaped red spot on the lower abdomen. While males grow to 12 mm and weigh up to 30 times less than them, they are sometimes even confused with other types of spiders, because their color is brown instead of black.



It is important to be cautious when viewing a spider that looks like a female black widow. Her bite is very feared because its venom is 15 times stronger than that of a rattlesnake. The truth is that although this bite can cause some discomfort in the body, most people do not suffer serious damage or die from it. Some researchers say that this spider is not aggressive; it only attacks when it feels in danger.

The black widow lives in warm places around the world. They are terrestrial and live in sheltered and dark places. Because they like warmer temperatures, when the cold season approaches, they search for a new



refuge. Many times these warmer places are in the houses of humans, which represents a risk.

Black widows are not aggressive and do not have the instinct to bite everything that comes in front of them unless it is something that attacks them. On the contrary, they are shy, lonely, sedentary, and nocturnal.

If you have wondered why they are known by the name of the black widow, it is because they typically eat the male after mating. Although sometimes they manage to escape, normally this is not the case. The body of the male stays on the fabric woven by the female to serve as food.

These spiders weave large, strong, and sturdy webs that they use to hang the cocoon with hundreds of eggs and to catch prey.

The web serves to fulfill an important function for feeding black widows since this is the support that allows these spiders to hang upside down, play dead, and wait for their prey to arrive. Since they have a regular vision, they perceive the vibrations to know that they have a prey close. They inject their prey with its venom and wait for the prey to die. After it is dead, the black widow injects it with gastric juices so that it dissolves, and then the spider can absorb it. They usually feed on insects, wood bugs, and other arachnids, among which are males of the same species.



egg sac

To reproduce, the females emit an odor that will determine whether or not they mate with a particular male. They take part in mating when they offer their sperm and place it in a place for the female to then put into her body. The eggs are laid in a compact mass and covered with a silk material that she will weave, forming a cocoon.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

# THE BLACK WIDOW



Answer the questions.



1. Discuss the various types of spiders you know.

-----  
-----  
-----

2. Why do people fear the black widow?

-----  
-----

3. What are the differences between the male and female black widow?

-----  
-----

4. Why is the poison of the black widow so feared?

-----  
-----

5. Where do black widows live?

-----  
-----

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

6. What physical and behavioral characteristics do black widows have?

-----  
-----

7. Why are they named black widow?

-----  
-----

8. What method do black widows use to hunt their prey? Why is the fabric they weave important?

-----  
-----

9. Look up what illnesses or diseases that a black widow's bite can cause a person. What did you discover?

-----  
-----  
-----

10. How do black widows reproduce?

-----  
-----

