

# Antelope Island Spider Festival

## Cob Web Spider's

Cob web spiders comprise part of the family Theridiidae (the-ri-DEE-i-dee).

Cob web spiders are also called **Comb-Footed Spiders**. They are called this because of the comb-like hairs on their legs that help them to navigate their disorganized webs.

Cob web spiders can also use the hairs on their legs to **fling silks strands** over prey items caught in their webs.

Cob web spiders typically have **large round ball-like** or globe-like abdomens, and very **slender legs**.



While Most cob spiders are **incredibly agile and quick** within their **own webs**, they move **very slowly and ungainly** when they are **on the ground**, outside of their webs.

Cob web spiders tend to hang upside down when in their webs. This is thought to be an evolutionary trait that allows them to move more efficiently with their large abdomens and slender legs by **taking advantage of gravity**, similar to a grandfather clock's use of gravity to swing its pendulum.

Cob web spiders make **3D webs that have no defined shape or symmetry**, and come in many different variations and patterns. Their webs tend to look **messy and unorganized**.

Cob web spiders tend to build their webs in **undisturbed areas**.

The family Theridiidae is comprised of over 100 genera and over 2000 individual species worldwide, (~234 spp. in 32 genera in North America).

Some of the common genera found in Utah are *Theridion* (the-ri-di-on), *Steatoda* (stee-uh-TOE-duh; False Widow Spiders), and *Latrodectus* (lah-tro-DEK-tuhs; Widow Spiders).

The genus *Steatoda* is sometimes confused for widow spiders because of their shapes and colors. However **they lack** the potent venom of widow spiders. They're also known to prey upon widow spiders as well as other arthropods

The *Steatoda* species commonly encountered in Utah is *Steatoda grossa* (stee-uh-TOE-duh

GROW-sah). It is a blackish-brown, but not as glossy as a black widow, lacks the hour glass symbol, and has 2-4 distinct



indentations in the back of its abdomen.

The genus *Latrodectus* are comprised of some **the most venomous** spiders known to man. While most of the other spider's venom in the *Theridiidae* family is not as potent.

In Utah the representative of *Latrodectus* is the **black widow** (*Lactrodectus hesperus*, lah-tro-



DEK-tuhs hes-per'-us), which is also the **only** species of spider of **medical significance** in Utah.

Black widows are the only spider in the USA that have a **neurotoxic venom**. This means that their venom directly affects the nerves and nervous tissues of its victims.

The black widow's bite is described as being unnoticeable and painless, to feeling like a small pin prick. The after symptoms can range from localized redness and swelling to intense spasmodic pain, sweating, nausea and cramping. These can last anywhere from **3 to 48+ hours** depending on the persons age, health, and the location of the bite.

The collective term for the symptoms caused by a black widow bite is **latrodectism** (lah-tro-DEK-tism).

**Death** from a black widow's bite is **extremely rare**, and only occurs in the segments of the human population that is **already at risk**, (the really young or old, immuno-compromised individuals, or those who have a severe allergic reaction to the bite).

Most hospitals treat black widow bite victim's **symptoms** instead of actually treating the venom. This is due to the fact that the antivenin can cause more problems than the venom itself.

Female black widows that are **accidentally "grabbed"** when picking up items that their webs are attached to, or ones **guarding egg sacs** are the most likely to bite a human.

Black widows are named such because the females have been observed to eat their male counter parts after mating, in laboratory settings. In the wild **mate cannibalism** for most species of black widow, including *L. hesperus*, is a rare event.

Cob web spiders, including widows, all **prey upon insects** that get stuck in their webs. Common prey items include cockroaches, crickets, flies, ants, earwigs, and moths. They'll also eat other spiders from time to time.

The cob web spiders tend to **regurgitate digestive enzymes into their prey** once it has been incapacitated and then **drink** the resulting soup back up with their **chelicera**, not their fangs.

Sources:

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