

Providing Leadership in Environmental Entomology

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Wolf Spiders

Wolf spiders are one of the best-known type of spider in the United States and other parts of the world. They vary widely in size, color and habitat. Small wolf spiders are less than one inch, whereas, some species are as big as two inches in length. In South Carolina many types of wolf spiders can be found in many environments. During summer months they can be found hunting in many locations, such as: woods, open grasslands, and along streams or lakes. Some wolf spiders can “walk on water” using tiny hairs on their feet to stay afloat. This allows them to escape predators, but also to feed on small prey in the water.

Wolf spiders have two hunting strategies. They can be idle predators that wait for prey to pass by, or they can actively hunt their prey. They react mainly to vibrations caused by wings beating or by prey walking on the ground. These spiders can eat a variety of prey, such as: houseflies, crickets, cockroaches, and occasionally grasshoppers.

Wolf spiders are mainly active at night, feeding during early evening hours, but they also are found active during the day along streams and lakes. One way to see these spiders during the night is by shining a flashlight at the ground or into a patch of woods. The spider's eyes will glow back at you. They have a disc located in the back of their eyes to help them see at night, and this disk reflects light from the flashlight.

Wolf spiders have an interesting life cycle. The female is known for her ability to care for her young. She produces an egg sac that may contain over 100 eggs. She attaches the egg sac to her abdomen. Weeks later, when the spiderlings are developed, the female rips open the egg sac wall, and the spiderlings climb onto her abdomen, holding onto her hairs. There can be several layers of spiderlings holding onto each other. The young only stay on the mother's abdomen for about a week before they disperse.

Before winter, wolf spiders may wander into homes and stay there for the duration of the cold weather. While indoors they remain behind doors, in windows,



Wolf Spider

photo courtesy Univ. Virginia

house plants, closets, or behind furniture. These spiders do not cause any harm to humans or homes.

The best way to control wolf spiders in your home is to take each case one at a time. Exclusion is the best strategy for keeping wolf spiders outside. Keep doors and windows screened and closed, and seal entry points around framing with weather stripping. This will prevent spiders and their prey from entering. If you find a wolf spider inside, the best way to get rid of it, is to use a container to catch the spider and release it outside.

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