

Redback spider

The redback spider one of Australia's most recognisable species, is very common around the AAEV site, especially around sheds, under garden furniture, barbeques, and garden equipment. Its bite is extremely poisonous, so it pays to be able to recognise it, guard against it, and know what to do if you are unlucky enough to get a bite.

Description



Mature female redbacks are jet black with a variable red stripe on the back of their spherical abdomen. Their tough, untidy webs are usually near the ground with the spider hiding in a shelter tucked in a corner, often guarding her round woolly egg sacs (left). Immature females are smaller, usually brown with whitish markings. Male redback spiders are rarely seen. They are small and brown with red and white markings.



Life history

Redback spiders feed mainly on ground-living insects that blunder into their webs, but small vertebrates such as lizards and even mice can fall victim. Also eaten - after mating - are the tiny male redbacks.

A female redback spider can produce eggs for up to two years after a single mating. Eggs are enclosed in 3-5 dirty-white, woolly, spherical egg sacs suspended in the retreat of the web and guarded by the female. Spiderlings emerge after about 14 days and disperse on the wind as soon as conditions are right. This is how redback spiders turn up in new places or quickly recolonise areas from which they have previously been removed.

Bites and how to deal with them

Redback spiders are not aggressive, and rarely leave the web. However caution is advised as their bite is very poisonous and potentially fatal for children or the elderly. Bites usually occur when part of the body comes in direct contact with the spider or its web. After a bite, the onset of pain may be delayed for five minutes then increase in intensity. Subsequent symptoms vary but have included:

- nausea
- vomiting
- abdominal or generalised pain
- sweating
- restlessness
- palpitations
- weakness
- muscle spasm
- fever.

If you are bitten by a redback, seek medical attention as soon as possible. Do not bandage the bite but apply iced water and take simple painkillers. An antivenene is available and very effective.

Managing redbacks

Manage redback spiders by learning to recognise their webs and the kinds of places they live. In places where they are likely to be a hazard, remove or destroy the spiders as you find them. Poke a stick into the retreat to remove or squash the spider, and destroy any egg sacs. Take care not to be bitten. Don't use insecticides or fumigation as they have only temporary effects on redback spider numbers and kill their natural enemies.

In bushland where these spiders belong and have a natural place, leave them to get on with their lives.

More information:

CSIRO Factsheet - <http://www.csiro.au/resources/ps1rv.html>

Australian Museum Factsheet - <http://www.amonline.net.au/factSheets/redback.htm>