

Doon Watch Nature Series for Dehradun Live Hindustan Times by Sanjay Sondhi

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The Menacing Mygalomorph

Our "nothing" night outs have allowed us to get a peep into the lives of many other nocturnal creepy-crawlies. A few nights ago, we were at the Shiv mandir (which, incidentally, the pujari informed us is more than a hundred years old!) at Danda Lokhand off Sahastradhara road. As we were "torching" our way through the night, at the smooth tiled floor of the temple entrance I spotted a large brown creature. Getting closer to it, I recognised it to be a Mygalomorph spider.

The spider was three inches across, very hairy with banded legs. It scurried across the slippery floor as we approached it. As we got really close, the spider raised its front legs and threatened us! Looking quite comical (or menacing depending how big or small you are!), half of the spider's body and its front legs were raised, threateningly. Issuing a harsh squeak (they are known to make noises when threatened), it warned us-don't come closer or else! As it raised itself on its haunches, it slipped on the smooth floor and found itself on its back. Yash and I had a good laugh at its expense. It was back on its feet quickly, and scurried into the temple, perhaps hoping God would protect it from these nasty intruders! Hiding behind the temple gate, the spider gave us ugly glares for the next 5 minutes or so. Laugh at me, will you, it seemed to say! Deciding that we had hurt the spider's feeling, we moved away, allowing it to return to hunting for prey.



Mygalomorph's are large predatory spiders. They are normally found on the ground in crevices or tree hollows. They sit hidden, at the entrance of their burrows, waiting for an unsuspecting victim. When suitable prey does arrive, they are quick to pounce on and bite it, thereby paralysing it. They move quite quickly, and often catch prey larger than themselves.

Mygalomorph's are amongst the world's largest spiders. The Goliath Bird-eater Spider found in South America is 12 inches in length! These spiders are sometimes also called tarantulas, but this is often a generally used term to describe large hairy spiders, and hence often misused. Most have venom, with which they paralyse their prey, though none in India have sufficient venom to harm a human. In fact, there is no spider in India that has sufficient venom to kill a human. Possibly the only spider whose bite can kill a human is the female Black Widow Spider (*Latrodectus* species), and this is not found in India, so if there are any of you out there with arachnophobia (fear of spiders!), you folks are safe!

Making a difference: There are so many ways that we can make a difference, some that we may be already doing, without thinking about it. For example, for all the earning members out there, the end of July is tax return filing time! So why don't you file your returns online; this means less paper, and hence is more environment friendly! See, its easy to do your bit.....

Feedback on this column is welcome at sanjay.sondhi1@gmail.com

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