

Woodlouse Hunter Spider *Dysdera crocata* (Koch)



GENERAL INFORMATION

Dysdera crocata feed primarily on woodlice, *Armadillidium vulgare* (Latreille) (also commonly called a sowbugs, pillbugs or roly-polys) and are found in cosmopolitan areas across America.[i] *D. crocata*'s distinctive red body and large chelicerae (mouth parts) make it particularly distinguishable from other spiders.[ii] It is a relatively passive spider and will not attack unless provoked. When disturbed, it does not retreat.

Because of its prey, it is most commonly found around damp wood. As with most spiders, *D. crocata* does not cause direct damage to historic objects, but will eat the insects that do, thereby signifying another type of pest infestation. [iii]

SIGNS OF INFESTATION

Unlike most spiders, the woodlouse hunter spider contains very strong chelicerae (mouth parts) that allow it to bite through the tough exoskeleton of woodlice and some beetles. It does not rely on webs to catch prey, but instead spends the daytime hours in a silk cocoon and hunt at night. It may remain in the silk cocoon for a month after feeding.

There are not many creatures that prey on adult woodlouse hunter spiders. However, during immature stages they may be targeted by a variety of animals, although there is no evidence of this. [iv]

FOOD SOURCES

The woodlouse hunter spider will be found in areas close to their food source. Woodlice prefer damp, rotting vegetation and wood, but cannot survive for long in dry conditions. Therefore, *D. crocata* are often found in basements, under stones and boards, around doors and windows, and in other areas that contain rotting wood.[v]

DIAGNOSTIC MORPHOLOGY

Adults:

- Brightly colored red and orange body with large, protruding chelicerae
- Cream colored abdomen
- 12-14 mm total length

Immature Stage:

Spiders are without metamorphosis. Spiderlings closely resemble adults. [ix]

LIFE CYCLE

A female spider will mate in any season, although the eggs will be laid only at certain times of the year. Multiple matings during the year will result in larger egg batches. In Britain, the females tend to lay their eggs from May – July.[vi] When bred in captivity, after hatching the spiderlings will take approximately a year and a half to mature, and live up to an additional two to three years.[vii]

CONTROL & TREATMENT

Nearly all spiders are predatory and require insects or small prey to survive. By eradicating their food source, spiders cannot survive. The most common food source of the woodlouse hunter spider are woodlice, which prefer damp environments such as basements and vicinities of rotting wood. Maintaining a dry and dust-free environment will minimize the pest infestation. In particular, for historic wooden objects the ideal environmental conditions are 45% RH and 20°C. [viii]

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Fact Sheet: Woodlouse Hunter Spider

[i] Hank Guarisco, “Three Species of House Spiders First Recorded in Kansas: *Dysdera crocata* (Dysderidae), *Scytodes thoracica* (Scytodidae), and *Cheiracanthium mildei* (Clubionidae),” *Transactions of the Kansas Academy of Science (1903-)* 94 no. 1/2 (1991), 73. [ii] Whitney Cranshaw and Boris Kondratieff, *Field Guide to Colorado Insects*, (Englewood, CO: Westcliffe Publishers, 2006), 55. [iii] Don Williams, *Saving Stuff*, (New York: Fireside, 2005), 251. [iv] J. A. L. Cooke, “Biology of British *Dysdera*.” *Oikos* 16 no. 1/2 (1965), 22. [v] David Pinniger, *Pest Management in Museums, Archives, and Historic Houses*, (London: Archetype Publications Ltd., 2001), 34. [vi] Cooke, 23. [vii] D. Ubick, P. Paquin, P. E. Cushing and V. Roth (eds), *Spiders of North America: An Identification Manual*, (Poughkeepsie, NY: American Arachnological Society, 2005). [viii] R. Barclay, R. Eames and a. Todd, “Care of Wooden Objects,” *Technical Bulletin* 8, (Ottawa: Canadian Conservation Institute, 1980), 6. [ix] Mallis, A. *Handbook of Pest Control*, Eighth Edition,