

THE OCCURRENCE IN FLORIDA OF THE BROWN RECLUSE
SPIDER, *LOXOSCELES RECLUSA*
(ARANEAE: SCYTODIDAE)¹

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For over five years physicians in Florida have been making diagnoses of loxoscelism. Whether the spider responsible for this condition, *Loxosceles reclusa* Gertsch and Mulaik, the brown recluse spider, is present in Florida is of serious medical importance.

A person bitten by the brown recluse spider may feel immediate discomfort, or he may not sense anything unusual for several hours. Blisters usually occur at the site of the bite accompanied by severe pain and noticeable swelling. The skin turns purple, then black as the skin dies. A deep necrotic core forms; the lesion is usually the size of a quarter. In rare instances, systemic reaction may accompany the local symptoms; however, death seldom occurs.

The spider is of medium size, measuring 3/8 inch in length and 3/16 inch in width. The legs are long. While appearing almost naked to the human eye, both the body and legs are covered with minute brown hairs. The dark fiddle-shaped band on the anterior portion of the carapace narrows to a thin center line extending almost to the abdomen.

There has been some confusion about the common name of this species. The name, "brown recluse spider" was accepted by the Committee of Common Names of the Entomological Society of America in November 1967, and names such as brown spider should not be

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used. The life history of *L. reclusa* was investigated by Hite *et al.* (1966), and by Horner and Stewart (1967).

So far as can be determined the native home of *L. reclusa* is the South Central States, especially Oklahoma, Texas, Missouri, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, western Kentucky, and western Tennessee. Even though the brown recluse spider is found most often in houses and farm buildings, its natural habitat appears to be outdoors under flat rocks or in the crevices of logs. The bluff habitat of northwestern Arkansas and southern Missouri seems to provide excellent environmental conditions for this species and according to Hite (1964) appears to be one of the original habitats. Because of the tendency of the brown recluse spider to live in crevices of old boxes, furniture, and in discarded clothing, it is inadvertently transported by man. Hite *et al.* (1966) said that this spider lived in the laboratory for six months without food or water.

According to Gorham (1968) parts of central Alabama and central Georgia are infested by the brown recluse spider. According to Gorham and Vazquez (1969), A. Vazquez in 1961 collected 16 specimens of this species from under the loose bark of a partially dead oak tree in the Griffin area of Georgia. J. Ross in 1968 visited the same site and collected eight more specimens. At that time this was the only collection of *L. reclusa* taken from a natural habitat in Georgia. The first report of the presence of the genus *Loxosceles* in Florida was that of *L. rufescens* at Miami noted by Gertsch (1958). In 1969 Gorham stated that *L. reclusa* had been intercepted in Jefferson County, Florida, but gave no details. The authors of the present article have twice identified *L. reclusa* specimens taken in Florida; the first time in 1968 in Jefferson County, and the second time in Alachua County, in 1970. In both instances determinations were verified by W. J. Gertsch, specialist in the taxonomy of the genus *Loxosceles*.

In the first case a single female was taken on 22 August 1968, at Monticello, Florida, by W. Bradford from the spare tire of a car owned by a school teacher new to the area. During the previous winter the car had been parked almost continuously in a driveway near Sikeston, Missouri, an area known to be infested by *L. reclusa*. During July it was driven to Jackson, Tennessee, a second known infested area. The spare tire on which the spider was found was installed during the first week in August in the driveway at Sikeston, and the car driven on 13 August 1968 to Monticello, Florida. W. H. Braatz, Jefferson

County Sanitation Director, inspected both the car and nearby premises repeatedly, but found no additional specimens.

In the second instance a single adult male was taken by Kryn Ververberg on 10 January 1970, on the wall of his bedroom in his parents' home at Gainesville, Florida. He had spent the Christmas holidays in Warrensburg, Missouri, an infested area not far from Kansas City. He had brought considerable clothing with him from Warrensburg. The premises were thoroughly inspected by H. Denmark of the Division of Plant Industry. No further specimens were found.

The above records give no indication that the brown recluse spider is as yet established in Florida. They suggest however, that *L. reclusa* is being constantly introduced in the state and that if conditions are favorable it will eventually become established.

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2.0141 The occurrence in Florida of the brown recluse spider *Loxosceles reclusa* (Araneae: Scytodidae).

ABSTRACT.—*Loxosceles reclusa* Gertsch and Muliak, a poisonous six-eyed spider of the family Scytodidae most easily recognized by the fiddle-shaped mark on the carapace, has been taken only twice in Florida. It was captured once in 1968 in Monticello, Jefferson County, Florida, and once in 1970 in Gainesville, Alachua County, Florida.—W. H. WHITCOMB and H. K. WALLACE, Department of Entomology and Department of Zoology, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32601.

Descriptors: Araneae; Scytodidae; *Loxosceles reclusa*, occurrence in Florida.



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