



HOME & GARDEN

Sunspiders (Windscorpions)

no. 5.589

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Quick Facts...

Sunspiders are unusual arachnids, relatives of "true" spiders and scorpions. They are sometimes called windscorpions because they are fast moving.

Sunspiders eat insects. They have large jaws and will bite if handled. However, they are not poisonous.

Sunspiders sometimes wander into homes and other buildings, attracted by lights that attract insect prey.

Sunspiders, also known as solpugids or windscorpions, are unusual arachnids found in many parts of the state. They are particularly common in the southeastern region.

They are very active and have prominent jaws, features which often cause people concern. Nonetheless, they are essentially harmless, although they can bite if handled.

Sunspiders are relatives of other arachnids, such as the true spiders and scorpions. However, they are in a different order (Solpugida). They have long, leg-like pedipalps on the side of the jaws, which makes it look like they have five pairs of legs.

There are approximately 15 species in the state, all in the genus *Eremobates*. The ones typically found in a home range from about 1/2 to 1 1/4 inches and are light brown to reddish brown.



Figure 1: Sunspider.

Life History and Habits

Sunspiders eat small insects and other arthropods, which they crush and chew with their large jaws. Most are active at night, but some may be active during the day. They hunt primarily by means of touch, using their long leg-like pedipalps. The pedipalps also have small hooks that allow them to climb even smooth, vertical surfaces. Sunspiders can run fast, and the name "windscorpion" comes from their ability to "run like the wind."

Sunspiders lay eggs under rocks and similar covered areas in burrows constructed by the mother. Some silk is used to line these protective burrows. The mother guards the eggs and even helps capture prey to feed the young. Sunspiders usually live one or two years.

Sunspiders and People

Sunspiders can bite if handled and may break the skin. However, they do not have poison glands, do not attack, and bite only if accidentally restrained. Despite this, there are many myths regarding the purported danger of these insects. For example, in parts of northern Africa and the Middle East, where sunspiders are common, people believe that if a sunspider falls into a watering trough, it will kill a horse that drinks from it. This belief, of course, has no foundation in fact.

Because of their fearsome and unusual appearance, sunspiders often cause alarm when they are discovered. This is particularly true when

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they wander into homes, where they may be found trapped in sinks. Home invasions are sometimes common during July and early August. Nighttime lighting, which attracts the insects on which sunspiders feed, is often associated with the accidental occurrence of a sunspider in a home.

Several measures can be taken to limit their movement into homes. Most important, seal any cracks or openings around the foundation and reduce lighting. Capture individual sunspiders on sticky traps or herd them into a container and dispose of them.



Figure 2: Sun spider, a.k.a. wind scorpion. (Photo by Whitney Cranshaw.)

Sunspiders as Pets

Sunspiders can make interesting and unusual pets. Terrariums should have a sand base with a few rocks or other materials for cover. The sand should be slightly moistened to allow tunneling and to provide the humidity they need. Cover cages because sunspiders are excellent climbers. They eat a variety of small, soft-bodied insects. However, they are fairly short-lived. Larger, mature individuals will likely survive only a few months in captivity.

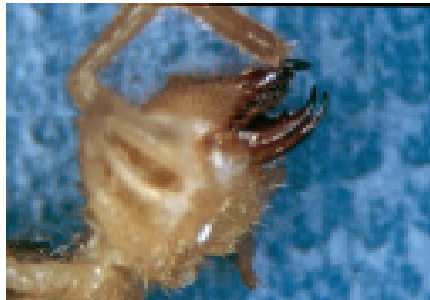


Figure 3: Head of sunspider showing jaws. (Photo by Whitney Cranshaw.)



Figure 4: Head of a sun spider. (Photo by Whitney Cranshaw.)