UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA
IFAS EXTENSION

EENY-238

Common House Spider, *Achaearanea tepidariorum* (C. L. Koch) (Arachnida: Araneae: Theridiidae)[1]

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Introduction

The common house spider, *Achaearanea tepidariorum* (C.L. Koch), may be the most abundant of the several species of spiders that live in the company of man in the southeastern United States, especially in Florida. Although Archer (1947) thought that *A. tepidariorum* was less common inside houses than *Pholcus phalangioides* Fuesslin (Pholcidae) in Alabama, he also noted its abundance.

Figure 1. Adult female common house spider, *Achaearanea tepidariorum* (C.L. Koch). Credits: Jim Kalisch, University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Levi (1967) considered *A. tepidariorum* to be a cosmopolitan species. Although the species was first described from Germany, it appears to be native to South America, judging from the numerous similar relatives which occur there. It is abundant in Central America and Mexico, and occurs as far north as southern Canada (Levi 1955). It has been recorded from most of the contiguous United States (Levi and Randolph 1975). The species probably now has a worldwide distribution, having been carried around the world by man on plants. Although *A. tepidariorum* belongs to the same family (Theridiidae) as the notorious black widow spiders (*Latrodectus* spp.), it is not known to be dangerous to humans. One case of serious allergic reaction to the bite of *A. tepidariorum* is known from Gainesville, Florida.

Systematics

This species was known for many years under the name *Theridion tepidariorum*. Archer (1947, 1950) created a new genus *Parasteatoda* for a group of species that Levi (1955) later considered to belong to the genus *Achaearanea*.

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Description

Carapace and sternum are yellow to brown, legs are yellow to brown with darker rings; the abdomen is higher than long, is gray with black and white pigment, and has a white spot behind the highest point, surrounded anteriorly by black with dark lines running down the sides and black chevrons behind; the venter has two light patches enclosing a darker area; the male is darker and smaller than the female; females range from 5 to 8 mm in length, while males are generally about 4 mm in length (Levi 1955, 1967).

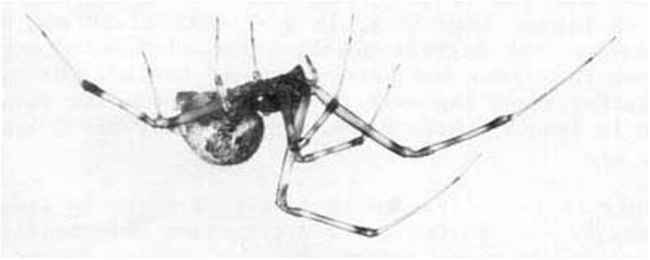

Figure 2. Adult female common house spider, *Achaearanea tepidariorum* (C.L. Koch). Credits: Jeff Lotz, Division of Plant Industry

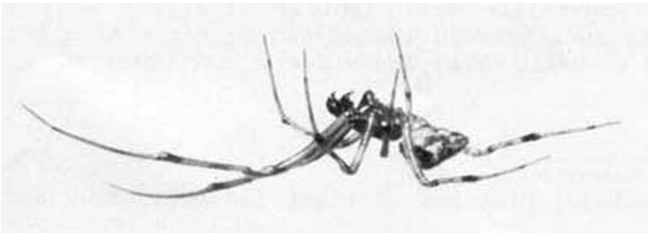

Figure 3. Adult male common house spider, *Achaearanea tepidariorum* (C.L. Koch). Credits: Jeff Lotz, Division of Plant Industry

Diagnosis

The species most likely to be confused with *A. tepidariorum* is *Tidarren sisyphoides* (Walckenaer). However, *T. sisyphoides* has a distinctive white stripe on the posterior part of its abdomen, and it forms a sort of "tent" out of a dead leaf in the middle of its web under which it hides.

Habits and Habitat

Females and juveniles make typical theridiid webs (tangle webs). These webs are frequently made between two adjoining edges of a building, for example, between an eave and a wall. Many individuals may occur in the same area and build nearly contiguous webs covering large areas of eaves, wall space, and window frames. Webs may be built both inside and outside of buildings; when inside, they are frequently a major contributor to the build-up of "cobwebs." Sheds, privies, barns and stables, in addition to dwellings, may have heavy populations of this species. Other characteristic habitats include undersides of highway bridges and culverts. It is largely absent in wild situations except around entrances and in chambers of eaves, on dry mountain ledges, and on dry ledges of river bluffs (Archer 1947).

A. tepidariorum feeds on a variety of prey, including German cockroaches and scorpions (Archer 1947; pers. obs.). While awaiting prey, spiders are usually positioned in the middle of their webs, but resting individuals may be nearer a lateral or upper edge of the web, where the complex color pattern on the spiders' bodies near the substrate may help camouflage them against some enemies. Frequently males may be seen hanging in webs of adult and subadult females. A single female, may produce many pear-shaped light brown eggsacs during the year, which are hung freely in the web. At least in Florida, all stages seem to occur throughout the year.

Selected References

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