

White-tailed spider

Lampona murina and *Lampona cylindrata*
Family Lamponidae

Key identifying characteristics

- 1-2 cm in length
- Grey to brown body
- Glossy orange-brown banded legs
- White or grey spot at the 'tail'
- Two similar spots near the front of the body may also be present
- Cylinder or cigar-shaped body

Males are smaller than females at around 12mm long. Females can be up to 18mm long. Juvenile white-tailed spiders have two faint white spots on the dorsal abdomen, with a white spot at the tip. The white abdominal spots are not as obvious in adults. The white 'tails' that give the spiders their name are present in both juveniles and adults.

Biology

White-tailed spiders are active hunters that live beneath bark and rocks, in leaf litter, logs and detritus in bush,

gardens and houses. White-tailed spiders are often seen in and around houses where they can find shelter and plenty of their favourite prey, grey house spiders. They eat many kinds of spiders. One sign that a white-tailed spider is sharing your house is that there are no other spiders.

Breeding

White-tailed spiders make temporary silk retreats and spin disc shaped egg sacs, each containing up to 90 eggs, which they lay under bark or stones. The female guards the eggs fiercely until they hatch. The young hatch in about three weeks, as long as the temperature is above 20°, which explains why they like to nest near the warmth of houses.

Dangers

Most people only have a mild reaction to white-tailed spider bites. Some people react badly to white-tailed spider bites and develop ulcers or blisters. Occasionally weals, blistering or local ulceration have been reported, a condition known as necrotising arachnidism. As most people do not keep the spider that bit them, doctors are unable to draw any definite conclusions about the relationships between white-tailed spider bites and severe ulceration. For this reason, if you are bitten try to find and keep the spider for identification.

Symptoms and treatment

A white-tailed spider bite will cause instant pain, followed by pain and soreness around the bite area. Swelling and tenderness may occur, and the patient may feel quite unwell. Nausea, vomiting, dizziness, lethargy and headache may occur. A day or so later a blister may form at the site of the bite.

An icepack should be applied to the area to stop the swelling. It is important to keep the area clean and to check it every day. If you can, keep the spider, as this can be used to identify it.

In most cases people only have a mild reaction to spider bites. Bites will usually heal within a week, but may take up to three weeks. It is not necessary to see your doctor immediately after a spider bite. If the bite area does not heal after three weeks, or starts to get worse and blister or ulcerate, see your doctor

