

RESEARCH NOTES

REPORT OF NECROPHAGY IN THE BLACK WIDOW SPIDER, *LATRODECTUS HESPERUS* (ARANEAE: THERIDIIDAE)

An unusual feeding behavior was observed in the western American black widow spider, *Latrodectus hesperus* Chamberlin and Ivie. One mature and one immature (sixth instar) female were introduced into a fifteen liter glass observation cage previously occupied by another spider. Both individuals actively explored the container. When the adult's legs made contact with a dead fly (Syrphidae) on the substrate, the spider immediately began throwing silk about it. This is one of the initial steps in the stereotyped prey capture sequence (Ross 1979). Both spiders were later observed feeding independently on the carcass. A second adult female, similarly placed in the abandoned container, was later found feeding on a large acridid presumed to be dead for over four days.

These observations are most unusual in that black widows and all other spiders are typically regarded as being strictly predacious (Bristowe 1958). Exceptions to the rule of total predation in the Arachnida are known to occur among members of the orders Acari, Opiliones, and Solifugae (Savory 1977).

Necrophagy in the black widow may serve as an accessory protein acquisition mechanism for use in emergencies. If this behavior is of more than occasional occurrence, it may supplement the ability of these spiders to fast for extended periods (Kaston 1970), enabling them to survive times of prey scarcity.

REFERENCES CITED

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