

## Spider bite update - Part II

Don't be surprised if the brown  
recluse shows up here someday

Part one of George Campbell's annual update on spider bites on the islands and in Lee County appeared in the Nov. 27, 1984, issue of The Islander.

By George Campbell

Illustrated by Ann Winterbotham  
With the huge influx of people (and materials to feed and house them) that Florida has experienced, it is not surprising that individual brown recluse spiders might be transported in luggage, clothing, lumber, paper and other cargo.

So don't be surprised if *Loxosceles reclusa* shows up here one of these days. Close relatives that might also show up are the South American species *L. lacta* of Chile and the aforementioned *L. gaucho*, both of which might possibly get along better in our mild climate than would the recluse, which is naturally accustomed to a colder, more northerly habitat.

One alien *Loxosceles* species is already established in California. Another, *L. reclusa*, seems to appear in the United States occasionally, but so far not in Florida.

With the thousands of jets that enter Florida from South America, it would really be surprising if one or another neotropical species did not find its way to our shores and become established.

The most likely place to encounter the brown recluse is in clothing or in bed. The reclusive creature usually hides indifferently in one part of its sticky, asymmetrical web.

In most places where it may live -- among papers, lumber, rubbish, under boards, litter, pipes, rocks and behind furniture or wall hangings -- it is quite unlikely to bite. But if it is resting in an article of clothing or hiding in your bed, the disturbance of your dressing or rolling over can cause it sufficient discomfort to bite. Adult females are more likely to bite and are much more venomous than the males.

The condition resulting from envenomation by a brown recluse has been named loxoscelism, or by some authorities, necrotic arachnidism. There is nothing funny about a severe case of loxoscelism, as you already know from Dr. Harry Kalc's account that appeared last week.

Charlotte Heimann called her bite a very bad and unforgettable experience. Comparing her description with known cases of loxoscelism, one can be convinced that she was indeed bitten by a recluse or another quite venomous species, even though she did not see the spider.

If it was indeed a recluse, it might have come here in a truck, moving van or even a personal car. But we will never know for sure because the biting animal was not collected and positively identified.

There are several other cases. Sanibel resident Carol Davenport, another possible recluse victim found her experience most unpleasant. Her symptoms were those of loxoscelism.

Barbara Jones of Captiva had her hand in a bag of wood chips when something bit her left wrist. Six quarter-inch red marks appeared and caused arm swelling, and each eventually grew to a half-inch in diameter. Jones told me it was a most unpleasant and painful experience. Her doctor administered penicillin and required her to immobilize the arm in a sling for some six

weeks. It was "unforgettable" and a "messy situation."

Another Captiva resident, Jane Morgan, was bitten on at least six different occasions during a period several years ago when she was working near and frequently entering a tool shed. Her symptoms were serious and like those of loxoscelism, with necrotic tissue and deep craters. Several times large quantities (half-cup) of pus-like fluid were drained from grapefruit-sized swollen areas.

Dick Noon, director of parks and recreation for the city of Sanibel, suffered his bite in 1973. But he speaks of it as though it were only yesterday. He had been working with well pipes, and if his bite took place among the pipes as he suspects, disagreeable symptoms were delayed until the next day and were systemic. Such a delay is characteristic of loxoscelism.

By evening the next day, Noon was "really in trouble." The whole affected calf swelled. The bite site was swollen to grapefruit size and was very red with a white center. It was very painful. Eventually the hard core began to slough off but did not heal for at least two weeks. The back of his calf eventually healed and no scar is visible today.

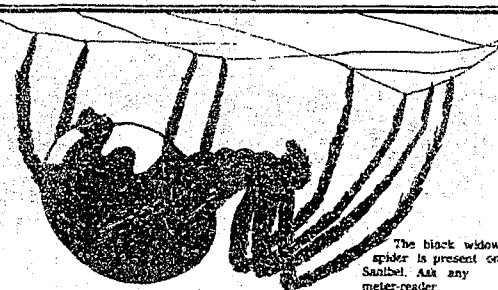
Noon and his doctor believed the bite to be from either a widow or recluse. I believe it was not a widow. Maybe it was *Chiracanthium* species, a known resident. The delayed reaction is not characteristic of widow envenomation.

It is certainly possible that *L. lacta*, *L. gaucho*, *L. reclusa* or other forms -- even *L. reclusa* -- could be here and causing the above-described problems.

Spiders of the genera *Chiracanthium* and *Aysia* are also possibilities. There is no proof that native forms cause symptoms like those of loxoscelism. But one European relative, *Chiracanthium solidum*, now established in North America, does and might have become naturalized on Sanibel.

After years of searching I have still to find any

Beautifully patterned in yellow, red and chocolate, the bishop's widow, *Latrodectus bishopi*, has been recently rediscovered.



The black widow spider is present on Sanibel. Ask any meter reader.

known dangerously venomous spider on Sanibel other than the black widow, *Latrodectus mactans*, and her relatives. Recently the most beautiful of all widow spiders was rediscovered. It is called bishop's widow, *Latrodectus bishopi*.

Some few decades ago while working as a field collector for Yale's Peabody Museum, Marshall Bishop and I first discovered this species living exclusively in *Serenoa repens* rosettes, the saw palmetto.

Recently I found, really rediscovered, the species and I now have three beautiful specimens, one of which is pictured here. Typical widow-shaped, the bishop's widow is chocolate brown with the typical red "hourglass" on the ventral side of the abdomen. Also, there are three yellow blotches rimmed with yellow dorsally on the abdomen. And there are three yellow blotches on each side of the abdomen.

It was wonderful to learn that this species, the most beautiful widow spider there is (with the possible exception of the "Union Jack" widow of Galapagos, which has a British flag design on it) is still extant.

The species is being proposed for inclusion on the federal Endangered Species list. Just imagine! A widow spider being protected by your taxes and mine! How would you like that?

It seems that so far all victims of serious spider bites have failed to collect specimens or, in fact, have never even seen the offending creatures.

If you are ever bitten by any small creature, it is desirable to collect the specimen if you ever

continued page 28

