

# Bugs R All

Invertebrate Conservation & Information Network of South Asia (ICINSA)

Newsletter of the

## Record of the Redback Spider from the Eastern Ghats of Tamil Nadu

The genus *Latrodectus* Walckenaer, 1805 is represented by 32 species worldwide (Shrestha & Dorr 2020). *L. hasselti* Thorell, 1870 is scattered in southern and southeastern Asian countries including India (Pocock 1900; Tikader 1987). Until 2007, only *L. hasselti* was known for India (Pocock 1900; Daniel & Soman 1961; Tikader 1987; Siliwal & Kumar 2001; Hippargi et al. 2012).

Later, *L. geometricus* Koch, 1841 (Shukla & Gour Broome 2007), *L. elegans* Thorell, 1898 (Kananbala et al. 2012) and *L. erythromelas* Schmidt & Klaas, 1991 (Srinivasulu et al. 2013) have been added to the Indian list (Parasharya et al. 2015). Simon (1897) considered Indian *L. hasselti* as a separate subpopulation and described it as a subspecies *L. hasselti indicus*. But Levi (1959) mentioned that its origin is unclear.



***Latrodectus hasselti* from Kiluvamalai RF, Madurai District, Tamil Nadu. © R.Kishore & P. Dailiah Roopha.**

The reports on the presence of *L. hasselti* from India are very modest. In India, it was first reported from Pune, Maharashtra (Simon 1897; Pocock 1900) and later on from Thane, Maharashtra (Daniel & Soman 1961), Bhavnagar, Gujarat (Patel 1973; Tikader 1987), Vadodara, Gujarat (Siliwal & Kumar 2001), Great Indian Bustard Sanctuary, Nannaj and Yedshi Ramling Ghat Wildlife Sanctuary, Solapur, Maharashtra (Hippargi et al.

2012). Recently, it was spotted in Hisar, Haryana by Goyal & Malik (2017). In Tamil Nadu, it was reported from Coimbatore, extending the known range to the southern part of Western Ghats (Kumar & Siliwal 2005). The earlier records point out the distribution of *L. hasselti* from the hill ranges of western India ranging from Gujarat to Tamil Nadu (Kumar & Siliwal 2005).



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Location of Redback Spider *Latrodectus hasselti* recorded in Kiluvamalai RF, Madurai District, Tamil Nadu.



Distribution of *Latrodectus hasselti* in India.

In 2019, during our study on faunal diversity in the thorn forests of Kiluvamalai in the Madurai District, Tamil Nadu, we sighted Redback Spiders. Kiluvamalai is a small hillock adjacent to Alagar Hills in Eastern Ghats with thorny vegetation and rocky terrain. The hill rejuvenates its greenery in the monsoon and post monsoon period from October to February.

On a hot sunny day of 30 December 2019 at 10.35h, we sighted a Redback Spider, an adult female on a piece of rock. A silky cobweb was observed near the spider beneath the rock. Another mature female spider of the same species was sighted within two meters from the previous individual. Photographic documentation was done in the field. The spiders were handled with caution during photographic documentation as the author was aware that the spider belongs to black widow spider family even though not sure about its



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species identity. The spiders were later identified to be *L. hasselti* with the help of illustration and descriptions in the literature (Pocock 1900; Goyal & Malik 2017).

The present record from Kiluvamalai, representing the southern part of the Eastern Ghats in Tamil Nadu is about 215 km southward from Coimbatore, the recent past record from Tamil Nadu along the Western Ghats. Kiluvamalai is separated from Palani Hills of Western Ghats by 30 km and forms a part of the discontinuous hills that includes Sirumalai, Perumalai, Alagar Hills, and Karanthamalai running along the southern Eastern Ghats (Narayanan 2016). This is the first report of *L. hasselti* in the Eastern Ghats of India and the second report in Tamil Nadu (being the southernmost occurrence of this species in India).

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# Bugs R All

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Newsletter of the

India - part II. Records of interesting species of the comb-footed genera *Latrodectus*, *Rhomphaea* and *Coleosoma* (Araneae: Theridiidae). *Journal of Threatened Taxa* 5(10): 4483–4491. <https://doi.org/10.11609/JoTT.o2660.4483-91>

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