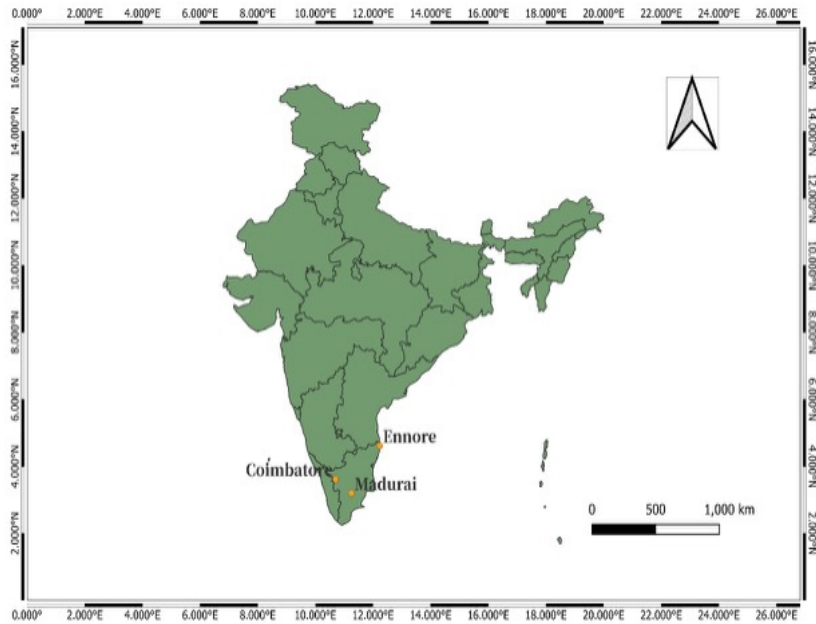


First record of the Redback Spider from Ennore Creek, Tamil Nadu, India

Widow spiders, belonging to the genus *Latrodectus*, are found worldwide (Graudins et al. 2001) and are recognized for their potent venom and their significant impact on human health. One such species, *Latrodectus hasselti* Thorell, 1870, commonly known as the Redback Spider or Australian Black Widow, is native to Australia, but has now spread to other regions, such as southeast Asia and New Zealand.



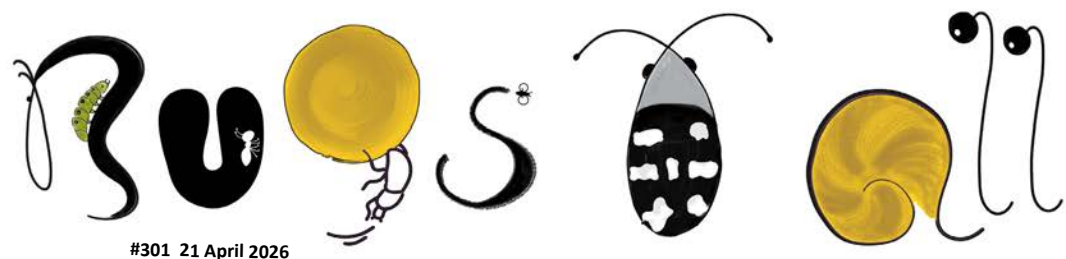
The occurrence of the Redback Spider in southern India.

According to the World Spider Catalog (2025), there are currently 52,984 documented spider species across 4,437 genera and 136 families. The Theridiidae family, which includes redback spiders, consists of 132 genera and 2,592 species. However, researchers estimate that the total number of spider species worldwide could surpass 120,000, indicating that a large portion remains undiscovered (Agnarsson et al. 2013; Framenau et al. 2022). In India alone, 1,971 spider species across 500 genera and 61

families have been recorded, with Tamil Nadu contributing 393 species from 214 genera and 46 families (Sen et al. 2024).

The presence of *Latrodectus hasselti* in India has been reported sporadically over the years, with relatively few documented occurrences. Initial records from Pune, Maharashtra, date to Simon (1897), who first noted the species, and were later confirmed by Pocock (1900). Further observations were

reported from Thane, Maharashtra (Daniel & Soman 1961), and from Gujarat, specifically Bhavnagar (Patel 1973; Tikader 1987) and Vadodara (Siliwal & Kumar 2001). Additional sightings were reported in the Great Indian Bustard Sanctuary at Nannaj and in Yedshi Ramling Ghat Wildlife Sanctuary, both in Solapur, Maharashtra (Hippargi et al. 2012), as well as in Chinnar Wildlife Sanctuary, Kerala (Adarsh & Nameer 2016), and in Zaheerabad, Medak District,



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Habitat of the Redback Spider *Latrodectus hasselti* at Ennore Creek, Tamil Nadu, India. © Anbarashan.

Telangana (Pravalikha & Srinivasulu 2014). Ennore Creek, located along the coast of Tamil Nadu (13.262° N, 80.313° E), supports a diverse range of plant and animal life. Its ecological composition including mangroves, mudflats, salt marshes, and backwater systems provides essential habitats for numerous species. However, the region has experienced significant ecological degradation in recent decades due to increasing industrial activities such as thermal power generation, fertilizer production, and port operations. Estuarine systems like Ennore Creek play a critical role in maintaining biodiversity by offering breeding grounds and food resources for birds, fish, and other wildlife, including migratory species (Chitrarasu et al. 2013).

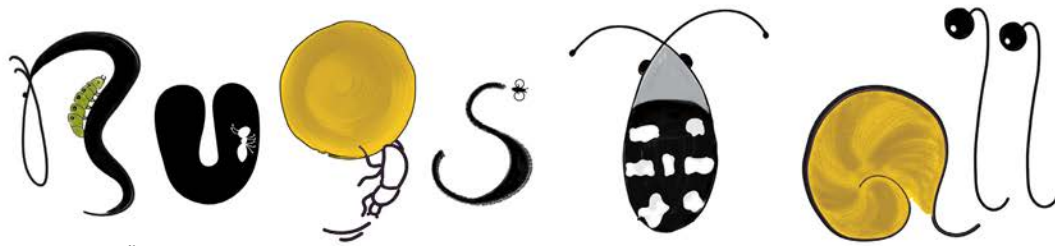
In our most recent observation in 2025, during a survey of flora and fauna diversity in the Ennore Creek area near Chennai, Tamil Nadu, we recorded the presence of Redback Spiders in an old fly ash dump pond characterized by salt marsh and grassland habitats. These

areas were predominantly vegetated with *Fimbristylis ferruginea*, *F. dichotama*, and *Aeluropus* sp., indicating the species' adaptability to coastal estuarine environments.

In south India, this species has been recorded previously in Tamil Nadu. The Redback Spider was first identified in Coimbatore, marking an extension of its known range into the southern Western Ghats (Kumar & Siliwal 2005). Subsequent records include Madurai and Kiluvamalai in the Eastern Ghats (Roopha et



***Latrodectus hasselti* Redback Spider from Ennore creek, Thiruvallur District, Tamil Nadu. © Anbarashan.**



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al. 2021). These observations suggest that its distribution in India spans several hill ranges, from the Western to the Eastern Ghats in the southern peninsular region (Kumar & Siliwal 2005). This report represents the first record of the Redback Spider from Chennai and the first from a coastal area in Tamil Nadu. Previously, the species was known only from hilly regions; this is the first time it has been documented in a low-lying coastal plain.

The observation of *Latrodectus hasselti* at Ennore Creek, Chennai, in October 2025 represents the first record of the species from the coastal lowlands of Tamil Nadu, the Chennai metropolitan region, and a fly ash dump habitat in India. The population appears established, with multiple adult females bearing egg sacs and at least one adult male recorded. The disturbed, warm, and dry conditions of the decommissioned fly ash pond are consistent with the species' known habitat preferences and may support its persistence in this novel setting. Targeted surveys of similar industrial coastal habitats in peninsular India are needed to determine whether this occurrence represents an isolated introduction or part of a broader coastal range expansion.

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