

RANGE EXTENSION OF *LATRODECTUS HASSELLTI* THORELL, 1870 (ARANEAE: THERIDIIDAE)

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web supplement

The genus *Latrodectus* Walckenaer, 1805 is represented by 31 species globally, which includes the Black Widow Spider *Latrodectus mactans* (Fabricius, 1775). In India, this genus is represented only by a single species, *Latrodectus hasselti* Thorell, 1870. Simon (1897) considered Indian *Latrodectus hasselti* as a separate subpopulation and described it as a subspecies *Latrodectus hasselti indicus*. Later, Levi (1959) considered the Indian subpopulation as part of Australian population of *Latrodectus hasselti* and synonymised *Latrodectus hasselti indicus* Simon, 1897 with *Latrodectus hasselti* Thorell, 1870. Platnick (2004) considers *Latrodectus hasselti* as a sub Pacific population of *Latrodectus mactans* of North America.

The reports on the occurrence of *Latrodectus hasselti* from India are very scanty -- only three published reports. It was reported for the first time from Pune (Simon, 1897; Pocock, 1900), later by Daniel and Soman (1961) from Suriamal in north Thana, Bombay, and recently, by Siliwal and Kumar (2001) from Vadodara (Baroda). Past records indicate the distribution of *Latrodectus hasselti* as being restricted to the western part of the country.

In 1997, the first author sighted a mature female of *Latrodectus hasselti* with an eggsac in an electricity meter box at a friend's house at Vadavalli, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu. The spider was photographed, collected and preserved in 70% alcohol and deposited at the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, Coimbatore. The eggsac was kept under observation in the laboratory for a few months, but ultimately desiccated. Though the author was not aware of the species identity it was identified to be a member of the black widow spider family and thus handled with caution. The spider was identified to be *Latrodectus hasselti* (Image 1^w) after referring to the illustration and description given by Pocock (1900). But as this species was already reported from India and not having any information on the distribution, the first author assumed its occurrence to be common in India. After Siliwal and Kumar (2001), it was clear that the distribution of this spider was restricted to the western parts of India, the occurrence in Coimbatore is being reported to indicate new information on the distribution of this species, on its range extension and first report from Tamil Nadu.

Present report of occurrence of *Latrodectus hasselti* from Coimbatore extends the known range to the southern part of Western Ghats by ca. 900km south of Pune, southern most

report of its occurrence in India (Fig. 1).

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Figure 1. Known localities of *Latrodectus hasselti* in India

^w see Image 1 in the web supplement at www.zoosprint.org



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Manuscript 1344; Received 15 March 2005; Revised received 20 August 2005; Finally accepted 25 September 2005; Date of publication 21 October 2005