

New species of Albino trapdoor adds to biodiversity jigsaw

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While the new spider is yet to be officially named, Dr Harvey says it adds a small piece to the overall giant biodiversity jigsaw puzzle. Credit: Volker Framenau

A new species of spider has been found near Northam -- just by chance.

The spider has been identified by the WA Museum as a new [species](#) of trap door spider from the Idiopidae family.

Nicknamed the albino trapdoor spider, it was spotted by Grass Valley resident John Cornish on his back veranda in July.

The white-headed, black and brown-legged spider about the size of a 50-cent piece was captured in a jar and handed to the Northam office of the Department of Environment and Conservation.

Wheatbelt National Resource Management spider expert Mick Davis realised it was potentially a new species.

Senior curator of arachnology Dr. Mark Harvey says subtle differences on the pedipalp and front leg of the male indicated it was a new type of spider.

“The pedipalp is used to transfer sperm to the female during mating and the front legs are used to lift her body up,” Dr. Harvey says.

“Comparing the sizes of the processes and the number of small spines on these structures with other species of white-headed trap-door spiders shows sufficient differences to conclude it is a new species.”

Dr. Harvey says new spider species were often discovered in WA but many areas remain poorly surveyed in relation to invertebrates—especially highly seasonal and cryptic species such as trap-door spiders.

“It’s likely this species has a very small natural range that has been affected by land clearing,” he says. “It may simply be hanging on in small remnant vegetation patches.

“The spiders make burrows in the soil that have tight-fitting trap-door lids. These lids are often difficult to see and the spiders can remain undetected without careful observations.

“Once the males mature, they leave their burrows and wander in search of females.

While the new spider is yet to be officially named, Dr. Harvey says it adds a small piece to the overall giant biodiversity jigsaw puzzle.

“We know of hundreds of new species but have insufficient time to prepare scientific descriptions,” he says.

“Full descriptions take a long time to prepare and publish and we have a very long back-log of new species waiting in the queue.”

Dr. Harvey says the discovery does not change any scientific thinking on spiders, but adds, “It is cool to see such a strangely colored [spider](#).”

Provided by ScienceNetwork Western Australia

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