

Arachnophobic entomologists: When two more legs make a big difference

September 16 2013

For some entomologists, an apparent paradox exists: Despite choosing a career working with insects, they exhibit negative feelings toward spiders which range from mild disgust to extreme arachnophobia.

An article in the next issue of *American Entomologist* features the results of a survey involving 41 arachnophobic entomologists who were asked questions about their fear of spiders. Although most entomologists had low scores (indicating mild disgust or mild fear), they still claimed to react differently to spiders than to insects. On the other end of the spectrum, some respondents scored in the clinically arachnophobic range and react to spiders in an almost debilitating manner.

Some of the arachnophobic and arachno-adverse entomologists developed their [negative feelings](#) toward spiders in childhood, well before choosing a career in entomology. These feelings were not overcome in adulthood.

"The results of the study show that arachno-adverse entomologists share with arachnophobes in the general public both the development of response and the dislike of many of the behavioral, physical, and aesthetic aspects of spiders," said Rick Vetter, author of the article.

"Paradoxically, I found that despite the great morphological diversity that insects exhibit and despite years of professional exposure to [insects](#), these entomologists do not assimilate spiders into the broad arthropod morphological scheme. However, for the most part these entomologists realized that their feelings could not be rationally explained. Through the

mere existence of the study, several of them took solace in learning that they were not alone with their negative spider feelings."

"Vetter's study illustrates how the fear of spiders found in some [entomologists](#) may have roots in negative events that happened in childhood," said Gene Kritksy, editor-in-chief of *American Entomologist*. "This gives us insight on how to lessen this fear in [future generations](#). If parents have a genuine interest in the natural world, including [spiders](#), and they share this positive interest with their children, it could reduce the incidence of arachnophobia in the long run."

Provided by Entomological Society of America

Citation: Arachnophobic entomologists: When two more legs make a big difference (2013, September 16) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-09-arachnophobic-entomologists-legs-big-difference.html>

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