

Scientists discover oral sexual encounters in spiders

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Credit: ZRC SAZU

Researchers from Slovenia have discovered oral sexual encounters in a spider, and have published their findings on April 29, 2016 in the journal *Scientific Reports*. Spiders are known for their unusual sexual behaviors, notably sexual cannibalism, but oral sexual encounters have not been well documented.

Matjaz Gregoric, a research associate at the Scientific Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (ZRC SAZU), Jovan Hadzi Institute of Biology, and coauthors studied the mating behavior of

the Madagascan Darwin's bark spider (*Caerostris darwini*), a sexually size dimorphic species from Madagascar with females several times larger and heavier than [males](#). They uncovered a rich sexual repertoire in *C. darwini* that predictably involved sexual cannibalism and genital mutilation. In addition, their surprising finding was that males of this species routinely salivate onto female genitalia.

"Oral sexual contact seems to be an obligate sexual behavior in this species as all males did it before, in between, and after copulations, even up to 100 times." said Gregorič who led the field and laboratory work that resulted in the current publication. Matjaz Kuntner, the senior author on this paper and chair of the Jovan Hadzi Institute of Biology ZRC SAZU only recently discovered and described *C. darwini*, noting that it produces nature's largest webs and toughest silk. Now, this intriguing finding adds sexual behaviors to the species' natural history.

Oral sexual contact is rare in the animal kingdom, except in mammals, where fellatio-like behaviors are known in macaques, lemurs, bonobos, hyenas, cheetahs, lions, dolphins and bats. However, cunnilingus-like behaviors, like the one shown in this spider are even rarer. Gregorič and coauthors suggest that oral [sexual encounters](#) could be a mechanism for boosting the male's chances of paternity by either signaling the male's quality or creating a chemical environment that would favor one male's sperm against the sperm of rival males.

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More information: Matjaž Gregorič et al. Spider behaviors include oral sexual encounters, *Scientific Reports* (2016). [DOI:](#)

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Provided by EZ Lab

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