

Six new species of goblin spiders named after famous goblins and brownies

June 21 2018



The newly discovered goblin spider species *Xestaspis kandy* in its natural habitat.
Credit: Suresh P. Benjamin

Fictional characters originally 'described' by famous English children's writer Enid Blyton have given their names to six new species of minute goblin spiders discovered in the diminishing forests of Sri Lanka.

The goblins Bom, Snooky and Tumpy and the brownies Chippy, Snippy and Tiggy made their way from the pages of: "The Goblins Looking-Glass" (1947), "Billy's Little Boats" (1971) and "The Firework Goblins" (1971) to the scientific literature in a quest to shed light on the remarkable biodiversity of the island country of Sri Lanka, Indian Ocean.

As a result of their own adventure, which included sifting through the leaf litter of the local forests, scientists Prof. Suresh P. Benjamin and Ms. Sasanka Ranasinghe of the National Institute of Fundamental Studies, Sri Lanka, described a total of nine goblin spider species in six genera as new to science. Two of these genera are reported for the very first time from outside Australia.

Their paper is published in the open access journal *Evolutionary Systematics*.

With a total of 45 species in 13 genera, the goblin [spider](#) fauna in Sri Lanka—a country taking up merely 65,610 km²—is already remarkably abundant. Moreover, apart from their diversity, these spiders amaze with their extreme endemism. While some of the six-eyed goblins can only be found at a few sites, other species can be seen nowhere outside a single forest patch.



The newly discovered goblin spider species *Xestaspis kandy* in its natural habitat.
Credit: Suresh P. Benjamin

"Being short-range endemics with very restricted distributions, these [species](#) may prove to be very important when it comes to monitoring the

effects of climate change and other threats for the forest habitats in Sri Lanka," explain the researchers.

In European folklore, goblins and brownies are known as closely related small and often mischievous fairy-like creatures, which live in human homes and even do chores while the family is asleep, since they avoid being seen. In exchange, they expect from their 'hosts' to leave food for them.



Step-by-step collection of spiders living in leaf litter. Credit: Suresh P. Benjamin

Similarly, at size of a few millimetres, goblin spiders are extremely tough to notice on the [forest](#) floors they call home. Further, taking into consideration the anthropogenic factors affecting their habitat, the arachnids also turn out to be heavily dependent on humans.

More information: U.G.S.L. Ranasinghe et al, Taxonomic descriptions of nine new species of the goblin spider genera Cavisternum, Grymeus, Ischnothyreus, Opopaea, Pelicinus and Silhouettella (Araneae, Oonopidae) from Sri Lanka, *Evolutionary Systematics* (2018). [DOI: 10.3897/evolsyst.2.25200](https://doi.org/10.3897/evolsyst.2.25200)

Provided by Pensoft Publishers

Citation: Six new species of goblin spiders named after famous goblins and brownies (2018, June 21) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2018-06-species-goblin-spiders-famous-goblins.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.