

# Meet the Persian Gold Tarantula: A new species discovery just in time for tarantula appreciation day 2023

August 8 2023

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Newly described tarantula species *Chaetopelma persianum*, commonly referred to as the Persian Gold Tarantula. Credit: Kari Kaunisto

The Persian Gold Tarantula (*Chaetopelma persianum*) is a newly

described species recently discovered in northwestern Iran. In fact, the "woolly, golden hairs" the scientists observed and examined on a single specimen, were one of the features so unique that it was not necessary for additional individuals to be collected and physically studied. It was clear enough that it was a species previously unknown to the scientific community.

The paper, authored by Iranian arachnologist and taxonomist Dr. Alireza Zamani (University of Turku, Finland) and his Canadian colleague Rick C. West, was published in *ZooKeys* on the observance of the Tarantula Appreciation Day: the 8<sup>th</sup> of August.

The [new species](#) belongs to *Chaetopelma*, a relatively small genus, distributed in Crete, Sudan, and the Middle East. It is also one of the only two tarantula genera inhabiting the Mediterranean region.

The newly published discovery also presents the first record of this genus in Iran and the third known species of tarantulas in the country. Additionally, it extends the known range of *Chaetopelma* spiders by almost 350 km eastwards.

The name of the new to science species, *Chaetopelma persianum*, pays tribute to its country of occurrence, as Iran has historically been known as Persia. The authors suggest "Persian Gold Tarantula" as a colloquial name for the species.

This [tarantula](#) is an obligate burrower and inhabits high elevations in well-vegetated mountainous regions of the northern Zagros Mountains. The collected specimen used to describe the new species was found in a self-made ground burrow on sloped rocky ground, amidst sparse low vegetation and grasses.



The newly described tarantula species (*Chaetopelma persianum*) seen in a defensive posture. Credit: Kari Kaunisto

It all started with local nature enthusiast Mehdi Gavahyan, who photographed a wandering male and sent the photo to Zamani. Having figured that the spider was likely a species currently unknown to science, the scientist asked Gavahyan to team up with Amir Hossein Aghaei, a nature enthusiast and a friend, and send him specimens of these spiders for further examination. However, Gavahyan and Aghaei managed to only collect and send a single female specimen that would later become the spider used in the species description.

Additionally, thanks to local citizen scientists and naturalists, the authors of the study later got hold of photos of another two males of the same genus, taken very close to the type locality of the new species: one in Sardasht in West Azerbaijan Province of Iran, and the other in the surroundings of Sulaymaniyah in Iraq. While it is highly probable that both these males belong to *Ch. persianum*, this cannot be confirmed until further examination of collected material from both sexes is conducted.

"Looking ahead, we believe that more comprehensive investigations employing integrative methods would greatly benefit our knowledge about the *Chaetopelma* spiders," say the researchers.

"Additionally, further collection efforts in lesser-sampled or completely unexplored regions, such as Saudi Arabia, Syria, Iraq, eastern Turkey and western Iran, could lead to the discovery of additional *Chaetopelma* [species](#) or records. These findings would be instrumental in gaining a more comprehensive understanding of the taxonomy and distribution of this genus."

**More information:** Shan Tong et al, *Podarkeopsis chinensis* sp. nov. (Annelida, Hesionidae) from southeastern China, *ZooKeys* (2023). [DOI: 10.3897/zookeys.1173.106112](#)

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