

# Spiders causing scare identified

By Our Staff Reporter

**KOCHI, JULY 15.** A team of research scholars from the Arachnology division of the Sacred Heart College in Kochi today claimed to have identified the spiders that had bitten several people in and around Durgapur area, nearly 200 km from Kolkata, as *Tarantulas*.

The team, comprising M.J.Mathew and A.V.Sudhikumar, visited Durgapur recently following speculation about the identity of the spiders. The identification was based on two male specimens (including a live one) obtained from Durgapur.

Mr.Mathew and Mr.Sudhikumar said these spiders belong to the family *Theraphosidae* (Tarantulas or Tiger Spiders) under the order Araneae, class Arachnida, Phylum Anthropoda.

"Tarantulas are characterised by their comparatively larger body size, blackish hair body, presence of enormously long pair of spinnerets (silk producing and spinning organs) extending beyond the abdomen, downwardly directed fangs (for biting and injecting poison) and compact eyes," they said.

The researchers met three patients admitted to the Durgapur Sub-divisional hospital after being bitten by Tarantulas. Ramji Roy (82) was bitten on the left hand on June 11. He was

admitted under the care of Dr.N.Banerji with a provisional diagnosis of "cellulitis" (infection of the skin and underlying issues). Mr.Roy had been referred to the nearby Burdwan Medical College as there was no improvement in his condition after two weeks of treatment.

In the second case, Tanjila Bibi (30) was admitted with a bite on her left palm. The researchers said the cellulitis



**The Tarantula.**

swelling on Ms.Bibi's hand extended from the palm to the forearm. "Her condition gradually improved with administration of high dose antibiotics and antihistamines." Anil Ruidas (50) was admitted with a bite on his right second toe. The bite area was marked by cellulitis and gangrene.

The researchers said Tarantulas are usually docile and unprovoked bites are rare. "However, their bites can cause severe pain, local swelling and numbness. The hairs can cause allergic reactions. But their bites can seldom kill a human being," they said.

Tarantulas are found on the roof of thatched houses, tree holes, among dried leaves, holes in soil and inside heap of firewood. The researchers said that Tarantulas are generally nocturnal and feed on insects, small lizards and even small birds. Males are usually smaller and darker than females. "These spiders, which never construct a web, can live up to 18 years," they said.

Detailed microscopic studies in laboratory had established their exact scientific name as *Chilobrachys hardwicki*, a species closely resembling *Poecilotheria miranda*.

The difference between these two spiders is in the structure of the stridulating organ (sound-producing organ), which can only be distinguished under high-resolution stereo microscopes. The researchers had communicated their findings to the civic and health authorities at Durgapur.

The Arachnology division at the Sacred Heart College has been conducting extensive research exclusively on spiders especially found in South India. The division headed by Dr.P.A.Sebastian has also launched a website with URL, [www.south-indianspiders.com](http://www.south-indianspiders.com) to provide general information on spiders and to share the research findings with the general public.