

New spider species spotted at Mangalavanam

TWO NEW species of spiders have been spotted in the mangroves of Mangalavanam by the scientists at the Division of Arachnology, under the Department of Zoology, at Sacred Heart College, Thevara, in Kochi.

One belongs to the wolf spider family called Lycosa while the other comes under the generic name Opodomata in Tetragnathidae family.

P.A. Sebastian, Reader, who leads the research on spiders here, said that the presence of these spiders needed to be validated in a science journal. The names of the spiders would be provided when it is published in the International Journal of Arachnology, brought out by the International Arachnology Society in the U.S.A.

During the hunt for spiders in Mangalavanam over a period of two weeks, the team of scientists spotted 33 different spiders under 28 genres from 13 families.

They include both the web-spinning variety and those, which do not spin a web. M.J. Mathew, A.V. Sudhikumar and E. Sunish are the research assistants to Dr. Sebastian.

Haven for spiders

The scientists are also planning to present a paper on Man-



A specimen

galavanam at the European Arachnology Colloquium to be held in Sofia, Bulgaria, in August. "Mangalavanam mangroves' bountiful natural flora is a haven for not just spiders but for a lot of other fauna too," said Dr. Sebastian.

The marshy land here was found to be home for a large number of Pisuara spiders. Dr. Sebastian said that as yet there were no reports of these spiders found in such large numbers.

The spiders of Aranidae family, found in large numbers at Mangalavanam, had been found very useful in biotechnological studies, Dr. Sebastian

said. The gene responsible for its web fibre had been found useful for commercial production of artificial silk using other animals and plants, he said. A biotechnology institute in the U.S. claimed to have produced artificial silk with this gene using goat's milk, he added.

Such silk fibre was comparable to an iron fibre of the same measure, Dr. Sebastian said. As such, there could be immense applications ranging from being used as surgical fibre to even parts of a parachute.

*By Shyama Rajagopal
Photo: Mahesh Harilal*