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Researchers identify rare species of spiders



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Gasteracantha dalyi – a rare spider sighted in Western Ghats. Photo: By Arrangement | Photo Credit: [sp](#)

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Researchers working with the Arachnology Division of the Department of Zoology at Sacred Heart College, Ernakulam, have identified more than 450 species of spiders in Kerala over a span of two decades.

Their work has brought them national and international recognition.

First sightings

P. A. Sebastian, head of the division, told *The Hindu* that the identifications include more than 50 new species, 50 first sightings in India and 55 endemic species.

“Significant contributions to the volume of studies include the study on jumping spiders of Kerala by Dr. Samson Davis Padayatti; taxonomy of the spiders of Kerala by Dr. Sunil Jose K.; spiders of the Kuttanad rice agro-ecosystem by Dr. A. V. Sudhikumar; spiders in the agricultural and forest ecosystem of central Kerala by Dr. M. J. Mathew; and study of the mygalomorph spiders by E. Sunish,” he said.

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Some of the research initiatives by the Arachnology division include taxonomy and phylogeny of spiders; biodiversity and conservation; spiders as bio-control agents; feeding and predatory potential of spiders in agro-ecosystems; diversity of spiders associated with human habitation (synanthropic spiders); behavioural study of the jumping spiders of Kerala and molecular biology of spider silk proteins.

The author of Spiders of India, Dr. Sebastian said that the Arachnology division also maintains a website on spiders – www.southindianspiders.org. "It is a colourful and informative site on spiders. We also have an extensive reference collection of spiders in Kerala," he said.

Dr. M. J. Mathew, a researcher at the division, is a recipient of the prestigious Endeavour Award instituted by the Government of Australia. As part of a postdoctoral research programme at the University of Western Australia and the Western Australian Museum in Perth, Dr. Mathew has identified eight new species and a new genus of spiders, distributed in Australia-Pacific and Asian continents.

Dr. Sebastian said that the research team has been giving taxonomic services to institutions including the Indian Institute of Pulses Research (IIPR), Uttar Pradesh; Tropical Botanic Garden and Research Institute (TBGRI), Kerala; Institute of Forest Genetics and Tree Breeding, (IFGTB), Tamil Nadu; Kerala Forest Research Institute, (KFRI); Central Plantation Crops Research Institute (CPCRI) Karnataka; Entomology Research Institute (ERI), Chennai; Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE); and Institute of Wood Science and Technology (IWST) in Karnataka.

Future research plans of the team include study of litter and ground-dwelling spiders of Western Ghats; DNA bar coding of spiders important to agriculture; molecular phylogeny of various groups of spiders; and bioprospecting of spider silk and spider venom.