



Home > Cities > Kochi

Spider DNA barcoding project on the anvil

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Published: 16th January 2012 11:00 PM | Last Updated: 16th May 2012 06:15 PM

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KOCHI: Spiders may not be as scary as they seem but are certainly intriguing. This fact has been established by the Division of Arachnology (study of spiders) under Department of Zoology at Sacred Heart College, Thevara. The college boasts of the only Spider Research Centre in South India. The division is functioning under the guidance of Dr P A Sebastian, senior most professor

in the Department of Zoology. Sacred Heart College's arachnology division has been operational for 13 years and has become an asset to the scientific world. Both, the government and the management have been taking interest in supporting Spider Research Centre here. The department even has a book "Spiders of India" published to its credit.

The centre is planning to start a project on spider DNA barcoding with an estimate cost of ₹4 crore. The arachnology division at the Sacred Heart College has around 83 species of spiders and their www.southindianspiders.org is the only website in India that has all the information about spiders.

Owing to the limited knowledge about the spider ecology and their interaction with other insects, arachnology is yet to be common in India and receive enough attention.

Dr P A Sebastian says, "About 500 species of spiders are found in Kerala and tiger spider is the biggest spider found in India. The tiger spider is so called because its legs are similar to those of the tigers. In Western countries, the tiger spiders are a source for making money. The tiger spiders can cost about \$400 depending upon its size. The researches have prove that the silk produced by the spiders are stronger than steel." Another interesting fact shared by Dr P A Sebastian is that the male spiders are smaller in size than the female ones.

Some female spiders even kill the male spiders after mating. The spiders found in India are not very poisonous and studies reveal that about 90 per cent of spider stings are not powerful enough to harm humans. The most deadly poisonous spiders are found in Australia and America, Dr P A Sebastian added.