

RAIN SPIDERS, *Palystes* spp. in the family Sparassidae.



Rain spider, *Palystes superciliosus*
Photo by Andre Botha of Queenstown, E. Cape.



Rain spider egg case.
Photo by Martin Botha of Selwyn, Roodepoort.

These are amongst our largest spiders, rivaling baboon spiders (African tarantulas) in legspan but not related to them at all. **They are harmless to people and their domesticated animals.**

Rain spiders are in a family of spiders distributed throughout the world, commonly called huntsman spiders, the scientific name for the family is Sparassidae. Our rain spiders are in the genus *Palystes* with 17 species described from southern Africa and 12 known from South Africa. The most commonly seen in and around our homes and gardens throughout the country is *Palystes superciliosus* and on the Cape Peninsula *Palystes castaneus*. Other species are smaller and less often seen.

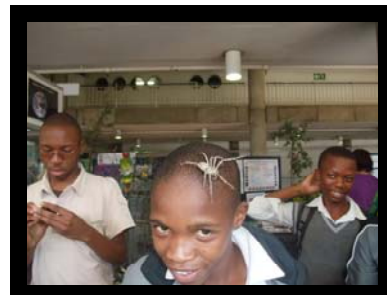
Rain spiders range in size from 15 - 40 mm. This measurement is **body length - omitting leg span**. Once they unfold their legs they can span up to around 100 mm - that's a BIG spider! It is really nice to know that they are harmless to humans.

They are nocturnal wandering hunters, and do not build webs. Although they normally live in vegetation, they often come indoors at night to hunt insects attracted to our lights which can cause quite a stir because of their impressive size. Rain spiders do not mature for two or three years and can live for up to four years. Males are a little slimmer than females, with smaller abdomens but longer legs. Females lay between 50 and 300 eggs in a grayish, cushion-like egg sac. The sac, covered with leaves and held together with silk, is hung in vegetation and guarded by the mother spider. The spiderlings emerge after about three weeks and cluster together under their mother's protection before they finally disperse.

If you would like to know more about spiders why not join the Spider Club of Southern Africa e-mail info@spiderclub.co.za or buy the book Spiders of Southern Africa by Astri & John Leroy, published by Struik.



Rain spider alert! Photo J Leroy



Rain spider demo. Photo A Leroy