



MEDIA RELEASE

Mouse Spiders

In September/October every year male mouse spiders (*Missulena pruinosa*) emerge from their trap door burrows following the scent of female spiders.

These large black spiders will stop at nothing to breed with the female, venturing through Territory houses and backyards.

Gavin Dally MAGNT natural sciences collection manager said Mouse spiders are aggressive when provoked and have large fangs capable of inflicting a painful bite.

“If bitten the venom from this spider can make a human sick and even require hospitalisation,” he said.

“During their breeding season it is best to let the spiders go about their business, until they go back to their hiding places for the remainder of the year,” he said.

“With the increase in moisture during the wet season, the male can leave his burrow without dehydrating, and search for a mate.

“To assist the males in finding them, the female produce silk which is laced with a pheromone (a special chemical scent) which the males can detect.

“The females are rarely seen unless their burrows are disturbed and lay long threads out of their trap doors to detect prey.

“Males are shiny black with a conspicuous white or bluish-white colour to the top of the abdomen, which is where the species name ‘pruinosa’ meaning covered with powder comes from.

“Mouse Spiders belong to the Trap-door family of spiders and their burrow is unique as it usually has two doors, instead of one.

“They can vary in size from a five to twenty cent coin in leg span.”

Mr Dally said Mouse Spiders are often confused with Funnel-web Spiders (*Atrax* species, family HEXATHELIDAE), which have caused severe illness and death in humans.

“Funnel-web Spiders live in cool, moist conditions and have not been found in the Northern Territory,” he said.”

Ends

Media Note – For more information contact Gavin Dally at the Museum and Art Gallery of the NT on 8999 8247.

Live mouse spiders available for photo opportunities.

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