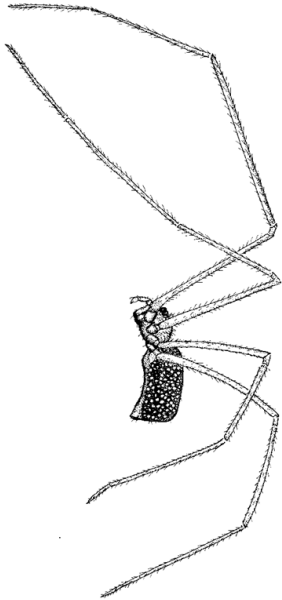


Cellar Spiders



Not all “daddy-long-legs” belong to the same group of animals. True daddy-long-legs are harvestmen or phalangids, but many arthropods that are given this name are actually spiders belonging to the family Pholcidae. The commonest spiders found in and around the home in California belong to this group. There are two common genera of cellar or daddy-long-legs spiders in California, *Holocnemis* and *Pholcus*. *Holocnemis* can be distinguished from *Pholcus* by the black underside of the

body. Both are introduced into the state from overseas. However, cellar spiders are now practically cosmopolitan so it is nearly impossible to determine where they originated.

These spiders have unusually long slender legs, with flexible tips. Most individuals are whitish gray with darker markings on the leg joints and underside of the body. Males and females are difficult to separate from one another. Females produce a round egg sac, which they carry in their jaws. The egg sac usually has a very thin outer coating of silk, and the individual eggs can be seen inside.

Cellar spiders are common wherever small insects are abundant. They consume large numbers of small insects, particularly mosquitoes, midges and other small flies. However they are also notorious for the messy disorganized webs they leave in and around homes and other structures. Cellar spiders have a tendency to congregate near each other. They are not social but are usually found together in aggregations.

Another distinctive characteristic of cellar spiders is

how they sit in their webs. They often hang upside down and when disturbed either shake so rapidly they appear to disappear in a blur or look like they are doing pushups.

Cellar spiders are said to have one of the most potent venoms found in spiders. However, this is an urban myth. All of the venom studies performed on cellar spiders show that the venom is no more potent than in any other spider. In any case their jaws are so small and weak they are unable to puncture the human skin, and therefore represent little risk to humans.



Cellar spiders feeding on a fly. Photo by Kathy Garvey.