

RECORD OF *POECILOThERIA REGALIS* POCOCK, 1899 FROM NALLAMALA HILLS, EASTERN GHATS, ANDHRA PRADESH

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The Nallamala (15°20'-16°31'N & 78°30'-80°10'E) is a group of low hill ranges in the central part of Eastern Ghats. It is an unbroken chain of rugged hills spread over 7,640km² (Srinivasulu & Nagulu, 2002). The vegetation is typically of southern tropical dry deciduous and southern tropical moist deciduous forest types intermingled with scrub (Champion & Seth, 1968). The climate is generally hot and dry with temperature rising up to 43°C to 45°C during May and dips down to 8°C in December. Average rainfall in this region is between 900 to 1,000mm. It includes two protected areas, namely the Nagarjunasagar Srisaillam Wildlife Sanctuary and the Gundla Brahmeshwaram Metta Wildlife Sanctuary.

Surveys were carried out in selected locations of Nagarjunasagar Srisaillam Tiger Reserve) from December 2001 onwards to document the faunal diversity. During the survey we sighted *Poecilotheria regalis* Pocock, 1899 in different locations. To study these large bodied spiders we basically relied on indirect evidence including exuvia and silk lined burrows/holes on tree trunks.

The Regal Parachute Spider *Poecilotheria regalis* Pocock, 1899 (Images 1&2^w) is arboreal and endemic to India. It was first described from Arakonam, North Arcot District, Tamil Nadu. Distribution includes many previously published localities in the Western Ghats, the Eastern Ghats and other localities from recent studies/sightings (Pocock, 1900; Molur *et al.*, 2004). Although first reported from the Eastern Ghats, it was widely collected from the Western Ghat localities from Mumbai to Palakkad. Recent surveys on the large bodied spiders carried out by us (MS) reveal its presence from hitherto unreported localities in southern India indicating its widespread distribution.

The presence of *Poecilotheria regalis* Pocock, 1899 had been noted from four different localities both from Farahabad Plateau in Mahbubnagar District and Srisaillam Plateau in Kurnool District. Three specimens and three exuvia were collected between December 2001 and August 2003.

One male in alcohol, 1.viii.2002, Thummalabailu, coll. Siva Rama Krishna and S.M.M. Javed, ERM/SPI/29A, ERM Labs Museum, Sunnipenta; one male, 16.ix.2002, tea shop, Shikharam, coll. Siva Rama Krishna and S.M.M. Javed, ERM/SPI/29B; one male, 7.viii.2003, Shikharam Temple, Shikharam, coll. Thulsi Rao and

team, ERM/SPI/29C. Morphometric range of the specimens is given in Table 1.

We also collected three exuvia of large bodied spiders during the study period that were confirmed to be that of *P. regalis* Pocock, 1899. Of these two were found in the wild, namely near Biarapur Cheruvu, District Mahbubnagar (Farahabad Plateau) and near Sunnipenta, District Kurnool (Srisaillam Plateau). The third exuvia is from the third voucher specimen (ERM/SPI/29C) collected from Shikharam that had been kept in captivity.

P. regalis can easily be distinguished from rest of the known species of this genus by the presence of the broad reddish band on the ventral side of the abdomen (Image 2). Males of this species are usually frequently sighted during the rainy season when they wander in search of females to mate (Molur *et al.*, 2004). While wandering the males enter nearby human dwellings. All the three specimens encountered during the present study are males and usually immediately after the rains. ERM/SPI/29A was found at the base of *Zizyphus oenophila* near Thummalabailu. There was no proper tree hole in which it could stay for long and there were no evidence of any web in any of the holes in the adjacent trees. ERM/SPI/29B, found on the table of a teashop in Shikharam, was collected in the morning after rain. The third specimen, also from Shikharam, was noticed on the temple wall.

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Table 1. Morphometry of *P. regalis* from Nallamala Hills.

Particulars	Measurement (in mm)		
	ERM/SPI/29A	ERM/SPI/29B	ERM/SPI/29C
Cephalothorax			
Length	21.0	16.5	18.5
Width	20.0	14.0	18.0
Sternum			
Length	11.0	7.0	9.5
Width	8.5	6.0	6.0
Leg I Length	100.0	81.5	86.5
Leg II Length	88.5	70.0	77.0
Leg III Length	73.5	58.5	66.5
Leg IV Length	89.5	73.0	80.0
Palp Length	74.0	42.0	49.5
Abdomen			
Length	23.0	18.0	22.5
Width	19.0	9.0	10.5
Total Body Length	44.0	34.5	48.0
Leg Formula	1>4>2>3	1>4>2>3	1>4>2>3

Stidulatory organs in form of setae and thick hair present between maxillae and chelicerae

w See Images 1 & 2 on the web supplement at www.zoosprint.org

