

## ILLINOIS DISTRIBUTION RECORDS OF THE BLACK WIDOW SPIDER

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During the last decade, a biological subject that never failed to arouse great interest was that of the black widow spider (*Latrodectus mactans* Fabr.). Popular attention is easily centered upon any bit of biology that combines the unusual with the dangerous. Naturally then, when the black widow spider became noticeably abundant in 1934-35, it quickly became good newspaper copy. Chamberlin and Ivie (1935) have attributed this increase in numbers to the mild winter of 1933-34 with its accompanying drouth.

This sudden popular interest caused scientific observers to publish their records of the black widow spider, and in the space of a very short time it was apparent

that it occurred in every state in the Union, as well as in Canada and the District of Columbia.

It is of some interest to note the rapidity with which observations extended the range of the black widow spider. The speed with which these observations came in was accelerated by Lowrie, who stated in *Science* in 1936 that there were still no records from Virginia, Minnesota, Iowa, Delaware, New Jersey, Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Vermont. Within a year of this statement, there were reports from each of these states. In some cases unpublished records were already in existence, but in other cases, such as Iowa and Minnesota, the black widow spider was truly found present for the first time. Minnesota was the last state to report its presence.

It was possible to trace this wave of interest in the black widow spider and to determine in some measure the time at which it reached its crest, by checking, in the *Insect Pest Survey Bulletin*, the reports from the entomologists of the various states. From 1921 to 1926 there were no reports. The first notice came from Arkansas in 1927. The number of reports climbed gradually thereafter until 45 per cent of the total number were made in the bulletins for 1935. Since 1935 there has been a marked decrease in the number of black widow spider reports, there being only two for 1939. The total number of 111 reports represents 33 states, the District of Columbia, and one Canadian province (British Columbia).

To come to the place of Illinois in this picture, we find a scarcity of reports, although the black widow spider is a common and often-noticed Arthropod in the southern areas of the state. At the present time there are in my hands twenty-nine reports for Illinois, representing 23 distinct localities of the state. Eleven of these 23 have previously been published. These records are being brought together here in an endeavor to point out the apparent absence of the spider from a large area in the central



and north-central part of the state (see map). It is felt that the black widow spider probably occurs in this area, but that as yet there has not been sufficient collecting to reveal it.

For the following records I am indebted to the kindness of Professor W. P. Flint and Dr. H. H. Ross of the Illinois State Natural History Survey, and to Dr. C. L. Metcalf and Dr. C. J. Goodnight of the University of Illinois. The unpublished records are from Pinckneyville (Perry), Oblong (Crawford), Vienna (Johnson), Valmeyer (Monroe), Marion (Williamson), Cisne (Wayne), Greenup (Cumberland), Charleston (Coles), Hanover (Jo Daviess), Clay City (Clay), East St. Louis (St. Clair), and Gillespie (Macoupin). Previously, Townsend (1936) had

reported the black widow spider from Thebes (Alexander), Carbondale (Jackson), Flora (Clay), Belleville (St. Clair), Jerseyville (Jersey), Irvington (Washington), and Barry (Pike). Lowrie (1936) reported records from Palos Park (Cook) and Momence (Kankakee). Spicer (1935) gave records from Pittsfield (Pike) and Springfield (Sangamon).

#### LITERATURE CITED

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