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# Occurrence of the Brown Recluse Spider (Araneae: Loxoscelidae) in Iowa

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Evidence for the extension in range of the brown recluse spider, *Loxosceles reclusa* Gertsch and Mulaik, to central Iowa is presented with comments on its biology and ecology.

INDEX DESCRIPTORS: *Loxosceles reclusa* Gertsch and Mulaik, brown recluse spider, Iowa.

There are few Iowa reports concerning the brown recluse spider, *Loxosceles reclusa* Gertsch and Mulaik, although several instances of bites have been published (Mast 1968, Anon. 1969). Dr. W.A. Rowley (pers. comm) has found several colonies in Ames, Story Co. On 5 February 1980, I found a colony on the dirt floor of a basement in Guthrie Center, Guthrie Co. Wingo (1964) did not include Iowa in his distribution map for this spider; however, the above reports are evidence for an extension of its range northward. It is not surprising that these spiders are overlooked because of their shyness and pale, inconspicuous coloration.

The colony was inadvertently discovered while examining a store basement for subterranean termites. The basement was rectangular (ca. 27 × 13 × 2 m) with a stone longitudinal dividing wall and stone supporting walls. It was devoid of light on the side of the dividing wall where the colony was located. The store owner verified that no disturbance had occurred on this side for approximately a year or longer.

Recluse spiders were abundant under debris on the floor (e.g., pieces of cardboard, broken window glass and clay tiles, lumber, plaster, and picture frames). Similar habitats with a dry soil substrate have been described by Gertsch (1958) and Hite et al. (1966). The recluse spiders found under this debris remained motionless when parts of it were slowly lifted. No recluse spiders were found on the walls or on the opposite side of the dividing wall. Presumably, even a slight disturbance for storage of boxes and the occasional light from a 60 W bulb near the ceiling discouraged their appearance. Preference for a dark habitat has been mentioned by Hite et al. (1966). It is thought that the recluse spiders in the basement had sufficient food because of the variety and abundance of dead insects on the floor and under the debris. Partial identification of these insects was made from parts in the webbing (Table 1). Silverfish (Thysanura: Lepismatidae) were active in the debris, but none of their exoskeletons were found in the webs.

This is the first time I have encountered recluse spiders after inspecting approximately 500 basements and crawl spaces in central Iowa. An adult female and one spiderling are deposited in my personal collection.

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Table 1. *Insects and insect parts identified in webs of Loxosceles reclusa from Guthrie Co., Iowa.*

Taxon	Number of Specimens <sup>a</sup>
Hymenoptera	
Ichneumonidae	2
Hemiptera	1
Coleoptera	
Carabidae	
<i>Calosoma</i> sp.	1
Two genera	5
undetermined	
Dermestidae	2 <sup>b</sup>
Ptinidae	2

<sup>a</sup>Specimens were collected from floor webs on debris covering an area of approximately .5 m.

<sup>b</sup>Living specimens