

The Burrowing Wolf Spider: Things that glow in the night.  
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With Halloween just around the corner, what better time to write about creepy, crawly creatures whose eyes glow red in the dark? Burrowing wolf spiders (*Geolycosa turricola*) are nocturnal spiders that can sometimes be located by shining a flashlight into a sandy area, where these creatures make their homes. Their eyes reflect the light and shine back at you.

Since we are surrounded by scrub in Highlands County, these arachnids are somewhat common. Their burrows, or homes, are round holes located on the ground in sandy areas. Even though you may see hundreds of these burrows, finding the resident isn't quite so simple. They are extremely reclusive creatures and don't come out very often.

When they do venture out of their burrows, it's either to hunt or mate. Instead of constructing webs to entangle prey, they hunt using their excellent vision, sense of touch, strong legs and large jaws. Wolf spiders have three rows of eyes. The top row consists of two medium sized eyes. The two large eyes are located in the middle row and the bottom row sports four smaller eyes. Males begin looking for females when they reach their reproductive age, but die after they mate. Most species of spiders live for a year, but burrowing wolf spiders can live twice that long.

They do have silk within their bodies, which they use to apply on the top of their burrows. This helps the hole from caving in. When constructing their burrows, they haul the sand out of the hole with their mouths and dispose of it in a nearby location. The hole is about eight inches deep and is slightly wider at the bottom. This area is used by the spider to turn around, eat and even lay some eggs.

When the eggs hatch, the young stay in the burrow until the exoskeleton, or outer protective frame, hardens and it can fend for itself. Then it's time for the juvenile to build their own burrow. The new home will be enlarged as the spider grows and requires more space. They have the ability to survive even if they don't eat for a couple of days because of their extremely slow metabolism. This is an important characteristic for them since they spend so much time in their burrows and don't ever travel far from home.

Their comfy residences allow the spiders to adjust their temperature. Since they live in such an extreme plant community and it gets so hot, they need to be able to find a way to survive such high temperatures. The creatures simply relocate within their burrows. If it is the hottest part of the day and the soil temperature has reached an uncomfortable level, the spider will simply move down to the bottom of its burrow to stay cool. When the night temperatures cool the soil, the arachnid moves up toward the top to reach the warmer soil. Since the burrow is underground, the humidity within keeps the spider from dying of dehydration and drying out.

When they do brave the elements and venture out of their safe havens, they depend on camouflage for protection. They don't have the colorful or "flashy" appearance of many other types of spiders. They blend in quite well with the habitat they live in.

There are about 40,000 different spider species in the world. They rank seventh in total species diversity among all other groups of organisms. They reside on every continent except for Antarctica. They live in just about every habitat except the ocean. These air breathing, eight legged arthropods are all equipped with fangs and they may be one of the most feared creatures on the planet. But the truth of the matter is that most spiders only bite humans in self-defense and few of these bites produce anything worse than that of a mosquito or bee. Even the most feared spiders such as brown recluse and black widows are shy creatures and only bite when threatened.

For all the arachnophobics out there, be comforted by the fact that these burrowing wolf spiders are reclusive, shy and in general, not dangerous to humans. Next time you're out walking at night, take a flashlight with you and shine it in the sandy areas. You might just be amazed when tiny red eyes shine back at you. Happy Halloween!