
Bark Scorpions

by: Mia Ditson

NOTHING TO MESS WITH



photos courtesy Wikipedia

The word to describe bark scorpions (*Centruroides sculpturatus*) is “slender.”

Their body (averaging 2½ in. total) is slender, the tail segments are long and slender. They have a fragile quality unlike the Giant Desert scorpion (*Hadrurus arizonensis*), and are uniformly tan. They are good climbers so will inhabit branches of trees and shrubs (hence the name), prey on smaller insects and are nocturnal. Their venom is highly concentrated and can be dangerous for some people.

A few months ago I had the extremely unpleasant experience of being stung by one. I was cleaning a storage room at Southwest Wildlife Rehabilitation Center and picked up a carry-on type bag. When it brushed my leg I initially felt something similar to the little fuzzies of prickly pear on my knee. For a few seconds there was no other sensation, but suddenly a fiery pain hit that spot. I thought “spider bite”



and searched, but never saw any kind of critter. By now it felt as though someone had stabbed my leg with a red-hot poker and my leg just didn't want to function.

I limped to the phone and called Poison Control. The volunteer asked me to describe the symptoms (nothing more than a tiny red dot) and the bite area. She told me the symptoms were indicative of a bark scorpion sting.

I was told to put ice on the site, if the pain got worse to take some Advil and if any swelling or breathing problems developed to take Benadryl, but not until such symptoms occurred. Also to call my doctor if further pain or problems developed. I wrapped an ice pack on my knee and headed home.

By now I was NOT in a good mood. The pain was incredible. After I'd driven about two miles I really wondered if I was going to make it home. I called a friend on my mobile and told him the route I was driving because I was beginning to feel "out of it" (also one of the possible symptoms). The pain was now god-awful and shooting in both directions up and down my leg. Once home I called my doctor. She basically told me the same thing Poison Control had, but told me to take the Benadryl immediately.

Since Benadryl puts me to sleep for 14 hours and I didn't want to zap what was left of my day, I didn't take any. I took some Advil, applied more ice and lay down. In spite of the pain, I did fall asleep for awhile and woke up with no pain at all! "Hey," I thought. "It's over!" For about an hour things were great. Suddenly, with no warning, the fiery pain hit again worse than before, now with the addition of muscle cramps. The doctor's office now closed, I called Poison Control again who suggested going to an emergency clinic. Instead, I called everyone I knew to see if they had any ideas.

Suggestions included aloe vera, baking soda paste, Epsom salt soak and crushed aspirin paste. Nothing worked. Neither did a search through all the books on bites and stings at the library. Doubling up on the Advil wasn't helping. Finally, someone suggested Listerine soaked cotton. It did seem to numb things a bit. I took Benadryl and went to bed. Even though I was asleep I could tell I was in a lot of pain. There was no way of getting comfortable and it was a thoroughly restless night.



By noon the next day the pain was inescapable. In desperation I called another friend to see if she knew of any herbal remedies. She read me the section on bark scorpion stings from the book, *Natural Remedies for Bites and Stings*, by Peter Bigfoot with Angelique Zelle. His description of the symptoms was exactly what I had been going through.

Of his remedies I decided to try prickly pear pulp. The instant I put it on the pain disappeared! When that dried out the pain started again but with less intensity, so I applied more. After about 24 hours of this the pain subsided to a tolerable level.

After a few days the pain was duller, but I had to frequently reapply the prickly pear pulp because the pain would “stab” again. I went through a period of numbness in my whole leg. I don’t remember how many days the symptoms actually lasted. After the worst was over that area of my knee felt bruised and extremely sensitive to touch. The actual bite site never showed any other evidence than a tiny red dot.

Getting stung in a more fleshy area of my body had been in my favor. Getting stung on a hand or foot allows the venom to enter the blood stream faster, possibly causing real problems. Fortunately, other than the pain, I did not have other reactions some people may be prone to.

I’ve been stung by the Giant scorpion and even though it hurts, usually 15 or 20 minutes of ice is all that’s needed. Until this experience, I’d never considered bark scorpions a big deal. But they are nothing to mess around with.

(Peter Bigfoot and Angelique Zelle are directors of the Reevis Mountain School and Sanctuary near Roosevelt, Arizona. Their book can be ordered from: HC02 Box 1534, Roosevelt, AZ 85545; phone: 520-467-2576.)

(The Desert Awareness Committee points out that this is the experience of one individual. People’s reactions to stings by desert critters and various types of treatments vary widely, and everyone must make his/her own decision about recommended remedies.)

