

Scorpions

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Scorpions are arachnids, close relatives of ticks, mites and spiders. They are easily recognized by their characteristic shape. Scorpions prefer dryland habitats but they do occur throughout Texas. They can be a nuisance when they interact with humans because they will sting when disturbed.

Description

All scorpions have a long, slender body with a five-segmented tail that can be arched over the back. The tail ends in a bulb-like poison gland or stinger. Scorpions have four pairs of legs and two large pincer-bearing arms (pedipalps) in front. Scorpions are well equipped to defend themselves or attack prey with their pincers and stinger. Between the last pair of legs is a comblike structure (pectines) that is used to identify surface textures and to detect prey.

Scorpions have two eyes on the top of the head, and usually two to five pairs of eyes along the front corners of the head. They do not see well, however, and must rely on the sense of touch, using their pectines and other organs for navigation and hunting. Their bodies are flat, which allows them to hide in small cracks, under rocks and under bark.

Worldwide, scorpions range in size from ½ inch to 7 ¼ inches long (including the tail) depending on the species. The most common species in Texas is the striped bark scorpion, *Centruroides vittatus*. The adult scorpion is about 2 ½ inches long, which is typical of the size of all species found in the state.

Biology

Scorpions hide during the day and become active at night. This behavior helps scorpions manage temperature and water balance, important functions for survival in dry habitats. Many species dig burrows in the soil. They detect and capture prey by the sense of touch. They also have a well-developed sense of hearing.

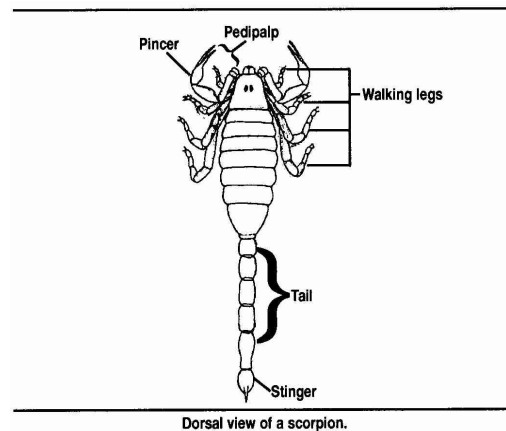
Scorpions hide under stones, bark, wood or other objects on the ground where they wait or search for prey. Chief foods are small insects, spiders, centipedes, earthworms, and

other scorpions. Once they capture their prey, they use the large pincers to crush and draw it toward the mouth. The body juices of the prey are eaten by the scorpion.

Some species may live for 20 to 25 years, but longevity of the typical scorpion is between 3 and 8 years.

Adult scorpions may have several broods of young. Following an elaborate mating process, which lasts from 24 to 36 hours, the female undergoes a gestation period ranging from 5 months to more than 1 year. The young are born alive in semi-transparent sacs. As soon as the young scorpions free themselves from these thin wrappers, they climb onto their mother's back.

Already capable of stinging, the young scorpions leave the mother after several days and begin to fend for themselves. Scorpions reach maturity in a year or more, depending on availability of food.



Dorsal view of a scorpion.

The sting of scorpions may be painful, or even deadly, depending on the species. Of 1,500 species of scorpions worldwide, only about 20 to 25 are regarded as dangerous. Stings from such species may cause paralysis, severe convulsions, cardiac irregularities, or breathing difficulties that may lead to death. Antivenins are available in areas where dangerous scorpions live.

A scorpion's venom is a mixture of compounds including neurotoxins that affect the victim's nervous system. Fortunately, none of the species in Texas are considered deadly. Stings from most of these species are about as painful as a bee or wasp sting, but the severity of the sting is dependent upon the individual scorpion and the person's reaction to the venom. As with any arthropod venom, allergic reactions are possible. In these situations, immediate medical attention would be required.

Habitat

Scorpions may be found in many types of habitats in the United States, including desert flats, sand dunes, desert and mesic mountains, grasslands, pine forests, deciduous forests, and chaparral. Species are most diverse in desert areas.

Taxonomic Status

About 90 species of scorpions have been identified in the United States. Texas has 18 species and only one species, *Centruroides vittatus*, occurs throughout the state. It is the only species of scorpion found in the eastern part of Texas. The number of species found in the state increases moving west and south. One species has been recorded in the Dallas area, two recorded near Austin, four near Amarillo, three near Abilene, five near Ft.

Stockton, eight in the Ft. Davis region, eight near Langtry, and 14 in Big Bend National Park.

Striped Bark Scorpion

The common, striped bark scorpion has two broad, black stripes running the length of its back. Populations in the Big Bend may be only faintly marked or completely pale. The basic color of the scorpion varies from yellow to tan in adults. Immature scorpions may be lighter in color. There is a dark triangular mark on the front of the head above the eyes. In young scorpions, the base of the pedipalps and the last segment behind the abdomen is dark brown or black. This species can be easily identified by slender pedipalps (pincer-bearing arms) and the long, slender tail. The tail is longer on males than females.

The striped bark scorpion apparently mates in the fall, spring or early summer. Gestation requires about 8 months. Litter size varies from 13 to 47. The average is about 31 young per litter.

Immature scorpions molt within 3 to 7 days after birth and remain on the mother for another 3 to 7 days after that. There are five or six molts to maturity. A striped bark scorpion probably lives for approximately 4 years.

The sting of this species causes local pain and swelling. Deaths attributed to this species have not been substantiated.

The striped bark scorpion is often found under rocks, under boards and in debris. It can be found indoors or outdoors in a wide variety of habitats (pine forests in East Texas; rocky slopes, grasslands, juniper breaks in other parts of the state). *Centruroides* are active foragers that do not burrow. They are distinctly associated with dead vegetation, fallen logs and human dwellings. It is common for them to climb trees and walls, and many times have been found in the attics of homes. During periods of hot weather, scorpions may move into living areas to escape the high temperatures in attics.

Scorpion Stings

When handled or disturbed, scorpions can inflict a painful sting using the poison gland at the end of the tail. Avoiding their habitats helps prevent stings. The stings from Texas scorpions produce only moderate reactions in most people because the poison has little affect on the nervous system. However, a person who is stung by a scorpion should be watched closely for adverse reactions. An ice pack applied to the affected area will relieve some pain. If swelling and/or pain persists or if breathing difficulties occur, immediate medical attention is necessary.

Scorpions as Pets

Scorpions have been kept as pets, but this practice is strongly discouraged. Scorpions should never be kept indoors or around small children. Scorpions with even relatively low poison levels can produce fatal reactions in young children and also in adults allergic to the toxin.

Control

Scorpions are difficult to control with insecticides alone. Therefore, the first control strategy is to modify the area surrounding a house.

- Remove all trash, logs, boards, stones, bricks and other objects from around the home.
- Keep grass closely mowed near the home. Prune bushes and overhanging tree branches away from the house. Tree branches can provide a path to the roof for scorpions.
- Store garbage containers in a frame that allows them to rest above ground level.
- Never bring firewood inside the house unless it is placed directly on the fire.
- Install weather-stripping around loose fitting doors and windows.
- Plug weep holes in brick veneer homes with steel wool, pieces of nylon scouring pad or small squares of screen wire.
- Caulk around roof eaves, pipes and any other cracks into the home.
- Keep window screens in good repair. Make sure they fit tightly in the window frame.

To control scorpions with chemicals, use insecticide products that contain any of the following:

- permethrin (Prelude®, Dragnet®);
- cyfluthrin (Tempo®);
- cypermethrin (Demon®);
- lambda-cyhalothrin (Demand CS®);
- deltamethrin (Suspend®);
- propoxur (Baygon®);
- diazinon;
- chlorpyrifos (Dursban®);
- malathion;
- synergized pyrethrins.

Apply pesticides around the foundation of the house and up to 1 foot above ground level on the exterior walls. Also apply pesticides around doors, window eaves and other potential points of entry. Follow directions on the package for dosage, mixing and application methods.

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Common Name: Striped bark scorpion

Scientific Name: *Centruoides vittatus* (Say)

Order: Scorpionida

Description: Scorpions are non-insect arthropods. Adults average about 2-3/8 inches (60 mm) in length, with the tail being longer in the males than in the females. Body color of adults varies from yellowish to tan, marked with two broad, blackish stripes on the upper surface of the abdomen. Populations in the Big Bend area may be only faintly marked or completely pale. There is a dark triangular mark on the front (anterior) portion of the head region (carapace) in the area over the (median and lateral) eyes. Younger specimens may be overall lighter in color, and basis of the pedipalps and the last segment of the body (postabdomen) is dark brown to black. The key recognition characters for this species are the slender [pedipalps](#) and the long slender tail.

Life Cycle: Scorpions are capable of reducing their metabolic rates to very low levels. Mating apparently takes place in the fall, spring and early summer. All scorpions are born live (viviparous), and embryos are nourished in the female's body (in utero or via a "placental" connection). Development (gestation) is estimated to take about 8 months, but varies depending on the species. Young are born in litter sizes from 13 to 47, averaging about 31. The young climb to the mother's back after birth and soon molt. After the first molt they disperse to lead independent lives. Immature scorpions molt an average of six times before maturity. Some species may live for 20 to 25 years but the typical scorpion probably lives between three and eight years. Adults may produce several broods.

Habitat, Food Source(s), Damage: Scorpions use the pincers to capture and hold prey. This species occurs under rocks, under boards, and in debris. It can be found indoors or outdoors in a wide variety of habitats (pine forests in East Texas, rocky slopes, grasslands, juniper breaks in other parts of the state).

Centruroides are active foragers and do not burrow. They are considered "bark scorpions" with a distinct association with dead vegetation, fallen logs, and human dwellings. It is common for them to climb, and many reports in homes are associated with attics. Scorpions remain sheltered in the daytime and become active at night. This behavior helps with regulating temperature (thermoregulation) and water balance. Their bodies are covered with a waxy cuticle which also helps reduce water loss. For reasons yet unknown, the scorpion cuticle fluoresces under ultraviolet light i.e., a blacklight.

Pest Status: Most common and widespread scorpion in Texas; stings are painful and produce local swelling and itching that may persist for several days. Reaction to the bite may vary based on sensitivity of the individual. Non-lethal stings may be mild to strong and produce edema (swelling), discoloration, numbness, and pain which may last for several minutes to several days. Deaths attributed to this species are not well substantiated. There are no scorpions in Texas that are considered lethal to man.

Management: See [Scorpions](#).

For additional information, contact your local [Texas Cooperative Extension](#) agent or search for [other state Extension offices](#).

Literature: Polis 1990; Shelley & Sissom 1995