



Bug of the week

Pseudoscorpions are little invertebrates resembling scorpions except they lack the stinger at their rear end and only measure a few millimetres long. They are harmless to us but are predators of mites, springtails, barklice, thrips, ants and other small insects that may be pests. They are reddish to brown, teardrop-shaped and have two long conspicuous pedipalps (pincers) that dominate their presence. They resemble a crab when walking and can walk as quickly backward as forward. Some pseudoscorpions stalk their prey while other species use a hide and ambush approach. They have poor vision and use sensory hairs on their pincers to find prey and seize them. The pincers have poison glands that paralyze and immobilize the prey. Like spiders, they inject saliva into the victim and feed on the liquefied contents. New Zealand has about 70 species of pseudoscorpions of which one species (*Chelifer cancroides*) is known to live in bee hives and feed on Varroa mites that are a major pest of honeybees.

Pseudoscorpions may have one or two generations in a year and usually live two to four years. A female can lay three clusters of 30 eggs per year that produce 64 young per year. Pseudoscorpions hitch-hike on other species such as moths to disperse. Cook Islands has two species here, *Geogarypus longidigitatus* and a species similar to or the same as the Funafuti pseudoscorpion (*Haplochernes* nr. *funafutensis*).



Left: *Geogarypus longidigitatus* (Photo: Gerald McCormack/CIBED, BYNC); right: *Haplochernes* nr. *funafutensis* & mm scale (Photo: M. Bowie)

Haplochernes nr. *funafutensis* can be found in large numbers on plants as mango trees.

Two species of *true* scorpion, the 11mm long dwarf wood scorpion, and a 7mm long unknown species of short-tailed whip scorpion have been found here in Rarotonga. Fortunately these two species are relatively harmless to humans. Only the dwarf wood scorpion has a venom-carrying stinger, but due to its size, it can only deliver a small amount of venom. In the unlikely event of this happening, it's probably only an issue for those with allergies to bee or wasp stings.



Left: Dwarf Wood Scorpion (*Liocheles australasiae*) and right: a new species of Short-tailed Whipscorpion (Hubbardiid) Photos: Mike Bowie

These two native species of scorpion are generalist predators of insects and other invertebrates in the forested areas and are important components of Cook Islands' biodiversity.

