

# The Southwestern Trapdoor Spider

Article by Camille M. Rich, Rio Grande Valley Chapter

Spiders are around us day in and day out. Sometimes I spot them, and sometimes I do not. I have noticed that the number of times I catch sight of spiders is in direct correlation to how big they are. The bigger the spider, the more (and sooner) I notice it.



Trapdoor spider with front legs raised -photo by Camille M. Rich

This was precisely the case on July 6, 2023, when my friend Cat and I were out and about at El Mesteño Ranch and Arboretum, which is in Northwestern Hidalgo County. As we walked the property, we observed from a few yards away what we thought, at first, was a Texas brown tarantula making tracks across the night sky viewing area.



Southwestern Trapdoor spider -photo by Cat Traylor

Upon closer inspection, we realized that although large (over one inch in overall length), this individual was a bit more delicate and refined—less fuzzy, overall, than a tarantula. It turns out it was not a Texas brown tarantula after all. It was the Southwestern Trapdoor spider.

Britannica online reveals the following information about Trapdoor spiders:

“Trap-door spiders construct burrows in the ground; at the entrance they build a silken-hinged door. The spider feeds by quickly opening the trap door and grabbing an insect that is passing close by. The door, often camouflaged, usually exceeds 2.5 cm (1 inch) in width. Tunnels off the main tube may also have doors. The spiders remain in the tube except when hunting. They are timid and quickly retreat into the tube if frightened.”

Cat and I observed this spider species once more on the night of July 29, 2023. It was out several hours after the sun had gone down—presumably looking for a late-night meal. We used our flashlight to study the intricate features of its form, down to the small hairs covering its entire body, legs included. On this night, this individual seemed much larger than the individual we had seen just a few weeks prior. Nevertheless, the sight of it on the red, sandy soil beside us gave us an appreciation for its ability to survive in this arid summer of extreme heat out on the South Texas Sand Sheet.



Night view of Southwestern Trapdoor spider -photo by Cat Traylor

There have been a few other historical observations of Trapdoor spiders at El Mesteño Ranch and Arboretum. Once upon a time, a brilliant, turquoise-colored Trapdoor spider (*Ummidia funerea*) came out after a rain back on February 8, 2019. A year or so later, on May 23, 2020, a Southwestern Trapdoor spider was washed out of its tunnel by rain. On the very next day, May 24, 2020, a Texas brown tarantula was also washed out of its home due to rain.



Above: Brilliantly hued Trapdoor spider (*Ummidia funerea*) -photo by Camille M. Rich



Left: Southwestern Trapdoor spider portrait -photo by Camille M. Rich



Articles on the Texas Brown Tarantula and the Trapdoor spiders found at El Mesteño Ranch and Arboretum in 2019 and 2020 can be found at the following links:

[https://elmestenoranch.com/2020/05/\\_/1619/](https://elmestenoranch.com/2020/05/_/1619/)

<https://elmestenoranch.com/ranch-fauna/insects-and-arachnids/>

[https://elmestenoranch.com/2019/02/\\_/1079/](https://elmestenoranch.com/2019/02/_/1079/)

Texas Brown Tarantula -photo by Camille M. Rich

Online Sources / Resources used for this photo story:

Brittanica Online: <https://www.britannica.com/animal/trap-door-spider>

iNaturalist: [https://www.inaturalist.org/observations?taxon\\_id=264036](https://www.inaturalist.org/observations?taxon_id=264036)

Discover Life: <https://www.discoverlife.org/mp/20q?search=Ctenizidae>

BugGuide:

<https://bugguide.net/index.php?q=search&keys=southwestern+trapdoor+spider&search=Search>

Texas Parks & Wildlife:

<https://tpwd.texas.gov/education/resources/texas-junior-naturalists/be-nature-safe/arachnids>