

## A Local Wolf Spider (*Hogna antelucana*)

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Under the halo of my flashlight, tiny specks of greenish glitter—like shiny dewdrops—dotted my scraggly nighttime lawn, each sparkle alerting me to a wolf spider hunting in the grassy, weedy soil.

The light beaming directly over each wolf spider shone back at me from its tapetum lucidum (“bright tapestry” in Latin), a reflective tissue in four of its secondary eyes. Occurring also in cats and some other mammals, reptiles, amphibians and fish, this tissue appears to improve a nocturnal creature’s vision in dim light.



Wolf spider (*Hogna antelucana*) is a nocturnal hunter

Of the spiders whose eyeshine attracted my notice, some posed for photographs, while others burrowed deeper in the dirt.

This particular wolf spider (*Hogna antelucana*) shares its genus—whose name seems to arise from a Latinization of Greek words for “pear”, or “pear tree”—with about 200 other species. Its species name, translated from Latin, means “before daylight”, indicating its nocturnal habits. Its family, Lycosidae, derives from the ancient Greek “lukos”, or “wolf” for its wolf-like hunting prowess. This spider’s clade or superfamily, Lycosoidea, means “eyeshine” in Latin.

A wolf spider, a hairy creature handsomely adorned with dark splotches or stripes, blends in with the soil and debris where it lives and hunts. *Hogna antelucana* reaches from about half an inch to an inch in length. Being both an ambush and a pursuit hunter, a wolf spider’s long legs, which bear three microscopic claws at their tips, enable it to adeptly chase quarry. Its eight eyes—a top row of two medium-sized, a middle of two large and a bottom of four small—offer excellent vision, second only to that of a jumping or huntsman spider. Though the wolf spider, like all spiders, produces silk from its rear spinnerets, very few of the thousands of species creates a web.

A female wolf spider, ready to mate, lays a silk trail containing sex pheromones. A male may begin his courtship display—waving legs and/or pedipalps (small grasping and sensory organs on either side of its mouth) against his body or the ground— before he spots his potential mate, a risky maneuver that may provide a conspicuous target for birds seeking a snack.

Unlike most invertebrates, a female wolf spider cares for her young. She spins a large spherical egg sac which she attaches to her spinnerets. She carries this sac under her abdomen until eggs hatch, becoming agitated or aggressive if it's dislodged. Newly hatched spiderlings climb aboard her back for about two weeks, where they're protected and warm until ready to fend for themselves. "Well, look at that!" cried my husband, shocked when he saw a mother wolf spider seemingly "carrying bundles on its back."

While this spider does not spin a web, it emits silk with which to enwrap its prey. A beneficial creature, it dines on ants, webless spiders, crickets and other small invertebrates, some of which harm valued plants.

Its foes include ground-foraging birds and larger spiders, including larger wolf spiders, among others.

Found in fields, grasslands and yards throughout much of the South and Southwest, this wolf spider will only bite if cornered or disturbed, and, while painful, a bite is not usually dangerous, with redness and swelling subsiding quickly.

Wolf spiders also hunt and take refuge in our homes. I have escorted many a wolf spider out of my house, tossing it in the yard to hunt for ants. And, alas, I tote out several spider corpses, felled by pesticide, as well.