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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

TAXONOMIC AND FAUNISTIC CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE SPIDER FAUNA OF IRAQ (ARANEAE)

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ABSTRACT

This study provides taxonomic and faunistic contributions to the knowledge of the spider fauna of Iraq (Araneae). It documents new occurrence data for several species and expands their known distribution within the country. *Enoplognatha macrochelis* Levy & Amitai, 1981 (Theridiidae) is recorded from southern Iraq for the first time. Additionally, *Hersiliola babylonica* Zamani & Marusik, 2022 (Hersiliidae), *Lycosa piochardi* Simon, 1876 (Lycosidae), *Uroctea thaleri* Rheims, Santos & van Harten, 2007 (Oecobiidae), and *Latrodectus dahli* Levi, 1959 (Theridiidae) are documented from Nineveh Province, providing updated distributional data for these species in Iraq. The study includes detailed photographic documentation of the examined specimens, including illustrations photographs of the copulatory organs of all recorded species, supporting accurate identification and facilitating future comparative studies.

Keywords: Hersiliidae, Lycosidae, Oecobiidae, Taxonomy, Theridiidae.

INTRODUCTION

The first publication on the spider fauna of Nineveh Province was by Reimoser (1913), based on specimens collected by Victor Pietschmann during an expedition to Mesopotamia. This study identified 18 spider species across 13 families from regions such as Mosul (Nineveh Province Centre), Baghdad, Babylon and Karbala, with some species also found in modern Turkey and Syria. It is the first publication on Iraqi spiders overall (Al-Khazali *et al*., 2023a). Since then, there has been no further data on spiders in Nineveh, despite over a century passing since that initial study.

This observation indicates that the documentation of Iraqi spider fauna is still poor and limited, even with the increasing interest and recent highlighting of this group of spiders by local and foreign researchers (Zamani and Marusik, 2022; Al-Khazali *et al*., 2023a; Zamani *et al*., 2024a). Moreover, even in the studied regions, there are no detailed investigations, and if they exist, they are constrained, as in Nineveh Province. According to the latest annotated

checklist, 104 spider species belonging to 75 genera and 29 families were documented from Iraq (Al-Khazali *et al*., 2023a). Subsequent taxonomic and faunistic studies have substantially increased the known diversity, raising the number of recorded species to more than 125 (Al-Khazali *et al*., 2023b; Al-Khazali, 2024; Zamani *et al*., 2024b). More recently, additional publications have reported further new records, new genus records, and even new species from different regions of Iraq (e.g., Hamid and Al-Khazali, 2025; Al-Mshrfawy and Al-Khazali, 2025; Najim and Al-Esa, 2025), clearly indicating that the currently available numbers remain provisional and that the spider fauna of Iraq is still far from being fully documented. We recently had the opportunity to examine newly collected material from Nineveh Province in the north, and from Thi-Qar Province in the south, and we found specimens of the species *Enoplognatha macrochelis* Levy & Amitai, 1981, which was previously unknown in Iraq. In addition, four other species represent new records for Nineveh Province. Therefore, the present study aims to document a new record of the Iraqi spider fauna from Thi-Qar Province, in addition to expanding knowledge of this fauna in Iraq.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Specimens' collection and deposition: Specimens were manually collected from the Sinjar District, Nineveh Province, northern Iraq, and from the Al-Nasr District, Thi-Qar Province, Southern Iraq (Map 1). Specimens from the Sinjar District were collected in rural agricultural areas and adjacent semi-desert habitats, whereas specimens from the Al-Nasr District were collected mainly from rural agricultural lands dominated by seasonal herbaceous vegetation. All specimens were preserved in 75% ethanol and deposited in the Zoology Laboratory, Department of Science, College of Basic Education, University of Sumer, Southern Iraq (CBEUS).

Identification: Specimens were identified through comparison with photographs, illustrations, and original descriptions available in the relevant taxonomic literature that included Rheims *et al*. (2007), Al-Khazali and Khalaf (2022), Zamani and Marusik (2022), and Al-Khazali *et al*. (2023b).

Dissecting and photographing: Female genitalia (epigynes) were dissected and cleared using potassium hydroxide (KOH) and distilled water to remove soft tissues. Photographs were taken using a stereomicroscope equipped with a Nikon digital camera. Genital structures were photographed in a xylene-filled dish to enhance clarity.

Measurements and mapping: All leg segments were measured in millimeters. Distribution maps were generated using Google Earth Pro (version 7.7.3).

RESULTS

Order, **Araneae** Clerck, 1757
Family, **Hersiliidae** Thorell, 1870
Genus ***Hersiliola*** Thorell, 1870
Species ***Hersiliola babylonica*** Zamani and Marusik, 2022 (Pls. 1, 2).
Determination: Zamani and Marusik (2022).

Diagnosis: The females examined from Nineveh Province in the present study fully agree with the original description of the general body habitus and the illustrations based on material from Al-Najaf Province that were provided by Zamani and Marusik (2022). Females of this species can be distinguished by the structure of the epigyne, which is distinctly wider than long and bears a short, broad septum. The septal stem is approximately as wide as the epigynal opening, while the base of the septum is thin and about half the length of the opening. The copulatory ducts are short and C-shaped, not forming a complete loop around the receptacles. The receptacles are elongate, about 1.5 times longer than wide, and are anteriorly separated by a distance approximately equal to their width.
Material examined: Nineveh Province, Sinjar District, outside the city center near the Syrian border, 1♀ (CBEUS), 36°15'4.65°N, 41°50'16.04°E, (Map 1), 21. ix. 2024 (leg. B.J. Tarkhum).
Distribution: Only from the type locality in Al-Najaf Province, central Iraq.
Comments: This species, recently described by Zamani and Marusik (2022), was identified from specimens collected in the 1970s in the desert of Al-Najaf Province, central Iraq, where both male and female specimens were documented. Our current specimens were collected more than 700 km from the type locality, a habitat similar to that of the type locality, semi-desert outside Sinjar District near the Syrian border. These anecdotal observations suggest that this species may prefer desert and semi-desert areas far from the city.

Family, **Lycosidae** Sundevall, 1833
Genus ***Lycosa*** Latreille, 1804
Species ***Lycosa piochardi*** Simon, 1876 (Pls. 3, 4).
For a comprehensive list of taxonomic references, refer to WSC (2026).
Determination: Al-Khazali *et al*. (2023b).
Material examined: Nineveh Province, Sinjar District, outside the city center near the Syrian border, 2♀♀, 1♂ (CBEUS), 36°15'4.65°N, 41°50'16.04°E, (Map 1), 21. ix. 2024 (leg. B.J. Tarkhum).
Distribution: According to the WSC (2026), this species is distributed in Turkey, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Iran.
Comments: This species was previously recorded from Iraq by Al-Khazali *et al*. (2023b), based on male and female specimens collected from three provinces: Dohuk, Thi-Qar and Basrah.

Family, **Oecobiidae** Blackwall, 1862
Genus ***Uroctea*** Dufour, 1820
Species ***Uroctea thaleri*** Rheims, Santos & van Harten, 2007 (Pl. 5).
For a comprehensive list of taxonomic references, refer to WSC (2025).
Determination: Rheims *et al*. (2007) and Al-Khazali and Khalaf (2022).
Material examined: Nineveh Province, Sinjar district, outside the city center near the Syrian border, 1♀ (CBEUS), 36°15'4.65°N, 41°50'16.04°E, (Map 1), 21. ix. 2024 (leg. B.J. Tarkhum).

Distribution: This species is found exclusively on the continent of Asia, specifically in six countries, two of Which are in Iraqi borders: Turkey, Iran, Palestine, Yemen, Iraq and India (WSC, 2026).
Comments: Al-Khazali and Khalaf (2022) previously recorded this species from Iraq, based on females collected from Thi-Qar Province in southern Iraq.

Family, **Theridiidae** Sundevall, 1833
Genus ***Enoplognatha*** Pavesi, 1880
Species ***Enoplognatha macrochelis*** Levy & Amitai, 1981 (Pl. 6).
For the list of references, see the WSC (2026).
Determination: Huseynov and Marusik (2008) and Gündüz *et al*. (2022).
Material examined: Thi-Qar Province, AL-Nasser District, from one of the palm orchards on the bank of Al-Gharraf River in the countryside of AL-Nasser City, 2 ♀♀ (CBEUS), 31.534582ºN 46.120739ºE, 12 m a.s.l. (Map 1), 15. viii. 2023 (leg. A. M. Al-Khazali).
Female description (Pl. 6): Measurements: Body length 5.62; Carapace 2.16 long, 1.51 wide; Opisthosoma 3.46 long, 2.56 wide. Leg measurements: I 6.02 (1.88, 0.83, 1.14, 1.38, 0.79), II 5.03 (1.47, 0.74, 1.12, 1.11, 0.59), III 5.12 (1.25, 0.79, 1.10, 1.13, 0.85), IV 6.16 (1.82, 0.94, 1.34, 1.19, 0.87). Carapace ovoid, with an anterior head margin almost square, yellowish-brown with dark edges, longer than wide, no hairs, except some sparse hairs in the middle of the head region. Sternum brown with dark margin, shield-shaped. Chelicerae are brown with dark fangs. Endite and pale light brown, the upper left corner is paler (yellowish brown) with a dense tuft of dark brown hairs. Coxae and legs are uniformly yellowish. Opisthosoma ovoid, dorsally greenish-brown, with a distinctive pattern, an intermittent band of black spots on the edges, and a central blade-like one, covered with brown setae, elongated at the edges, ventrally, generally the same color and pattern as the dorsal side, except that the lateral black spots are closer together than on the dorsal side, so they appear in a continuous band up to the spinnerets (light brown), forming a ring around them. Epigyne: ventrally, with strong, hardened posterior edges, spermathecae are distinctive, large and round, genital opening and the posterior edge form a triangular structure.
Distribution: North Macedonia, Greece, Turkey, Cyprus, Israel, Azerbaijan and Iran (WSC, 2026).
Comments: This species is known in seven countries (WSC, 2026), two of which are neighboring Iraq, Turkey and Iran, specifically from the Iranian provinces of Kermanshah and Ilam, which are adjacent to the Iraqi border. Therefore, it is expected to find this species in Iraq.

Genus ***Latrodectus*** Walckenaer, 1805
Species ***Latrodectus dahli*** Levi, 1959 (Pls. 7-9).
For a comprehensive list of taxonomic references, refer to WSC (2026).
Determination: Souri *et al*. (2024), and Zamani *et al*. (2024).
Material examined: Nineveh Province, Sinjar District, outside the city center near the Syrian border, 1♀ (CBEUS), 36°15'4.65°N, 41°50'16.04°E, (Map 1), 21.ix.2024 (leg. B.J. Tarkhum).

Distribution: The species is known from North Africa, Turkey, Cyprus, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Iran, as well as the Middle East and Central Asia (WSC, 2026).
Comments: This species is first recorded in Iraq by Najim and Al-Hadlak (2020), based on female specimens collected in Basrah Province, southern Iraq. It was subsequently recorded in central Iraq, in Al-Najaf Province, by Zamani and Marusik (2022). The third record, from northern Iraq, suggests that the species may be widely distributed in this country.

DISCUSSION

Despite more than a century and a decade having passed since the first spider study in Nineveh Province (specifically Mosul), the region remained devoid of any new data or subsequent publications. Even during the last decade, which witnessed a significant improvement in the study of Iraqi spider fauna, this improvement did not extend to Nineveh province due to the harsh security conditions that limited the possibility of conducting field surveys there. Therefore, documenting any new records from Nineveh is an important step in bridging the knowledge gap in this region, especially given its border location with Syria and the biogeographical significance that entails. Historically, the documented spider fauna of Iraq was limited to 32 species. However, the growing interest in taxonomic studies has led to a significant expansion of knowledge, with the number reaching 128 species according to the latest publications (Al-Khazali, 2024; Zamani *et al*., 2024b), only eight of which were previously known from Nineveh Province. The current study adds four new species to this province, bringing the total number of recorded species to 11 (Tab. 1).

Conversely, studies published in recent years have shown that Thi-Qar Province has become an important center for enriching the taxonomic knowledge of spiders in Iraq. Al-Khazali (2024) documented the emergence of some new species from the province, including *Talanites gilgamesh* Al-Khazali (2024), in addition to recording the first appearance of several genera of taxonomic value. Al-Khazali and Fomichev (2021) also demonstrated the importance of southern Iraq as a habitat for *Berlandina mesopotamica* Al-Khazali (2020), as the availability of additional specimens from Thi-Qar that confirmed the female's description and the identification of the genus morphology. Female's description and strengthened the genus's morphological identification. In another study, Al-Khazali (2020) explained that the that the recorder genus *Berlandina* Dalmas, 1922, from Thi-Qar represents the first appearance of this genus in Iraq. The results of Al-Yacoub *et al*. (2025) supported this trend with the description of *Eresus urus* Al-Yacoub & Zamani, 2025. Based on these combined findings, it is clear that this province is currently one of the most important national sources of new taxonomic discoveries, Conversely, Nineveh Province represents a historical lacuna in the literature, which contemporary investigations have only recently begun to elucidate. This disparity underscores the need to intensify field surveys in less-studied areas to ensure a comprehensive picture of arachnid diversity in Iraq.

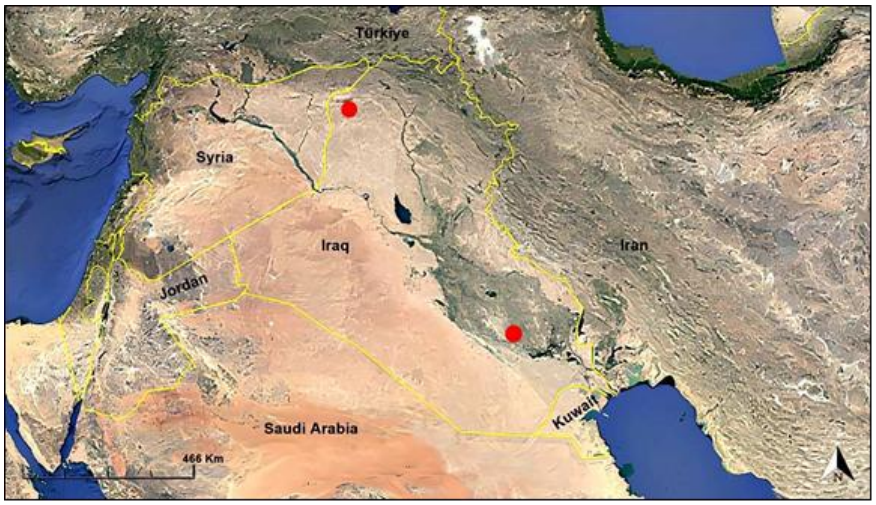
Table (1): List of spider species recorded in Nineveh Province, northern Iraq.

Family	Genus	Species	Reference
Araneidae	*Argiope*	*Argiope lobata* (Pallas, 1772)	Reimoser (1913)
Dysderidae	*Dysdera*	*Dysdera westringi* O. Pickard-Cambridge, 1872	
Filistatidae	*Filistata*	*Filistata insidiatrix* (Forsskål, 1775)	
Hersiliidae	*Hersiliola*	*Hersiliola babylonica* Zamani and Marusik, 2022	Current study
Lycosidae	*Lycosa*	*Lycosa piochardi* Simon, 1876	
Oecobiidae	*Uroctea*	*Uroctea thaleri* Rheims, Santos & van Harten, 2007	
Salticidae	*Pellenes*	*Pellenes flavipalpis* (Lucas, 1853)	Reimoser 1913 [sub *Pellenes simoni* (o. Pickard-Cambridge, 1872)
Sicariidae	*Loxosceles*	*Loxosceles rufescens* (Dufour, 1820)	Reimoser (1913)
Sparassidae	*Eusparassus*	*Eusparassus walckenaeri* (Audouin, 1825)	
Thomisidae	*Bassaniodes*	*Bassaniodes graecus* (C. L. Koch, 1837)	Rreimoser (1913) [sub *Xysticus graecus*].
	Thomisus	*Thomisus citrinellus* Simon, 1875	Reimoser (1913) [sub Thomisus spinifer o. Pickard-Cambridge, 1872
10	11	11	Total

CONCLUSIONS

This study shows that although local interest in spiders has grown significantly over the past decade, the full extent of spider diversity in Iraq remains largely unknown. We estimate that the actual number of species is at least five times higher than currently documented. This is due to Iraq's varied environments, ranging from mountains and deserts to farmland, and to the scarcity of comprehensive research.

Many regions have yet to be studied, and even previously examined areas have received only limited attention. Our results underscore the importance of continued zoological and taxonomic studies to uncover additional species, document new discoveries, and deepen our understanding of Iraq's spider diversity.



Map (1): Map of Iraq, showing the specimen collection locality from Thi-Qar and Nineveh provinces (Red circles).

Plate (1): *Hersiliola babylonica* Zamani and Marusik, 2022, female; (A) Habitus, dorsal view, (B) Habitus, ventral view, (C-E) Epigyne: C. intact, ventral view; D. macerated, ventral view; E. vulva, dorsal view.

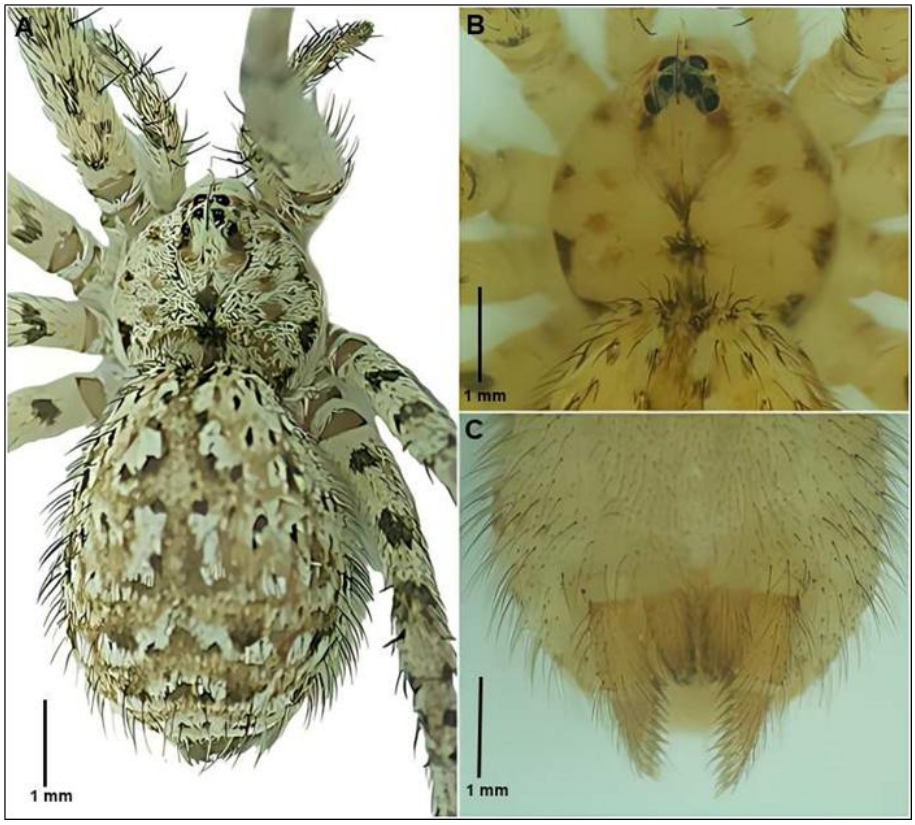


Plate (2): *Hersiliola babylonica* Zamani and Marusik, 2022, female; (A) Habitus, dorsal view (live specimen), (B) Carapace, (C) Spinnerets.

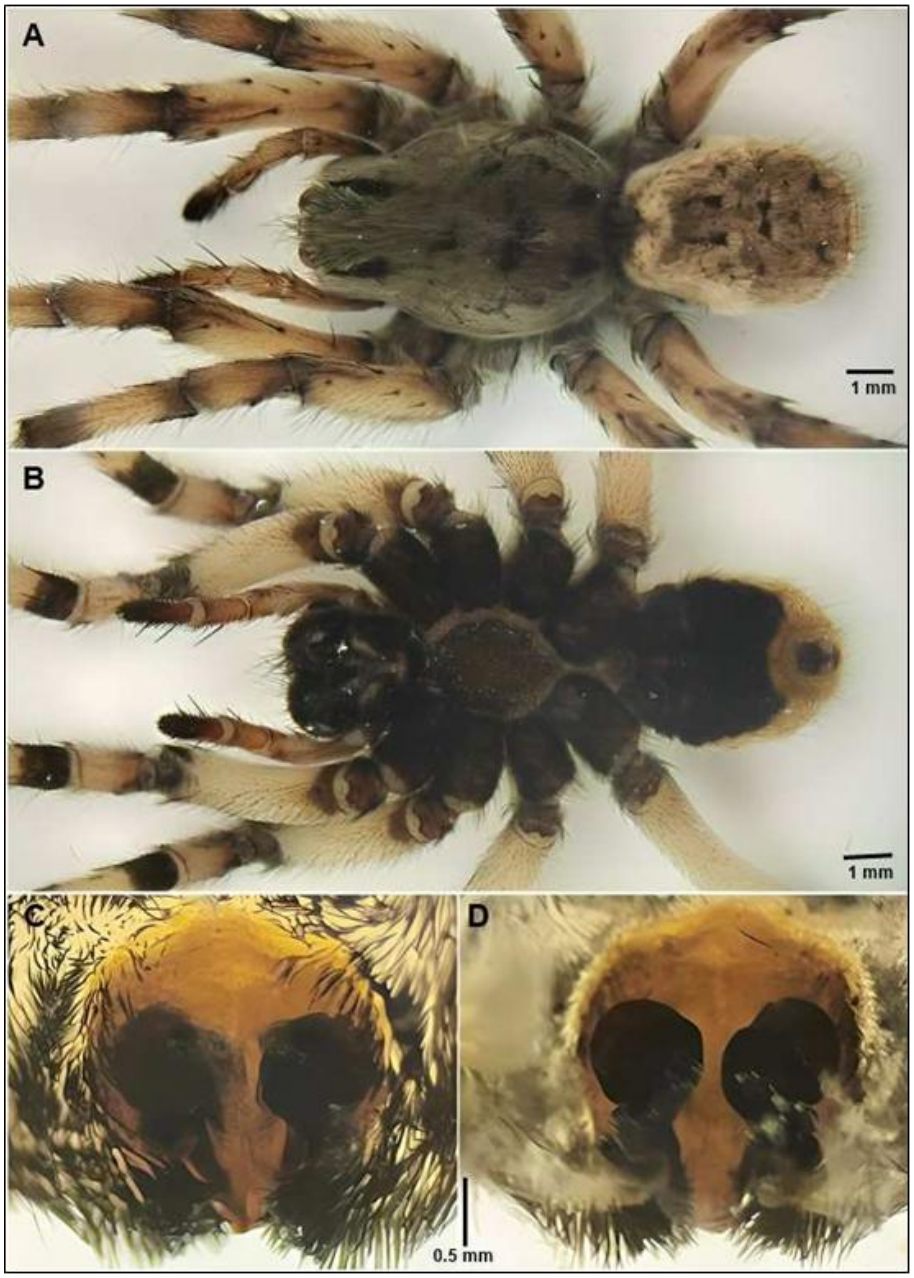


Plate (3): *Lycosa piochardi* Simon, 1876- female; (A) Habitus in dorsal view, (B) Habitus in ventral view, (C) Epigyne (macerated)- ventral view, (D) Vulva, dorsal view.

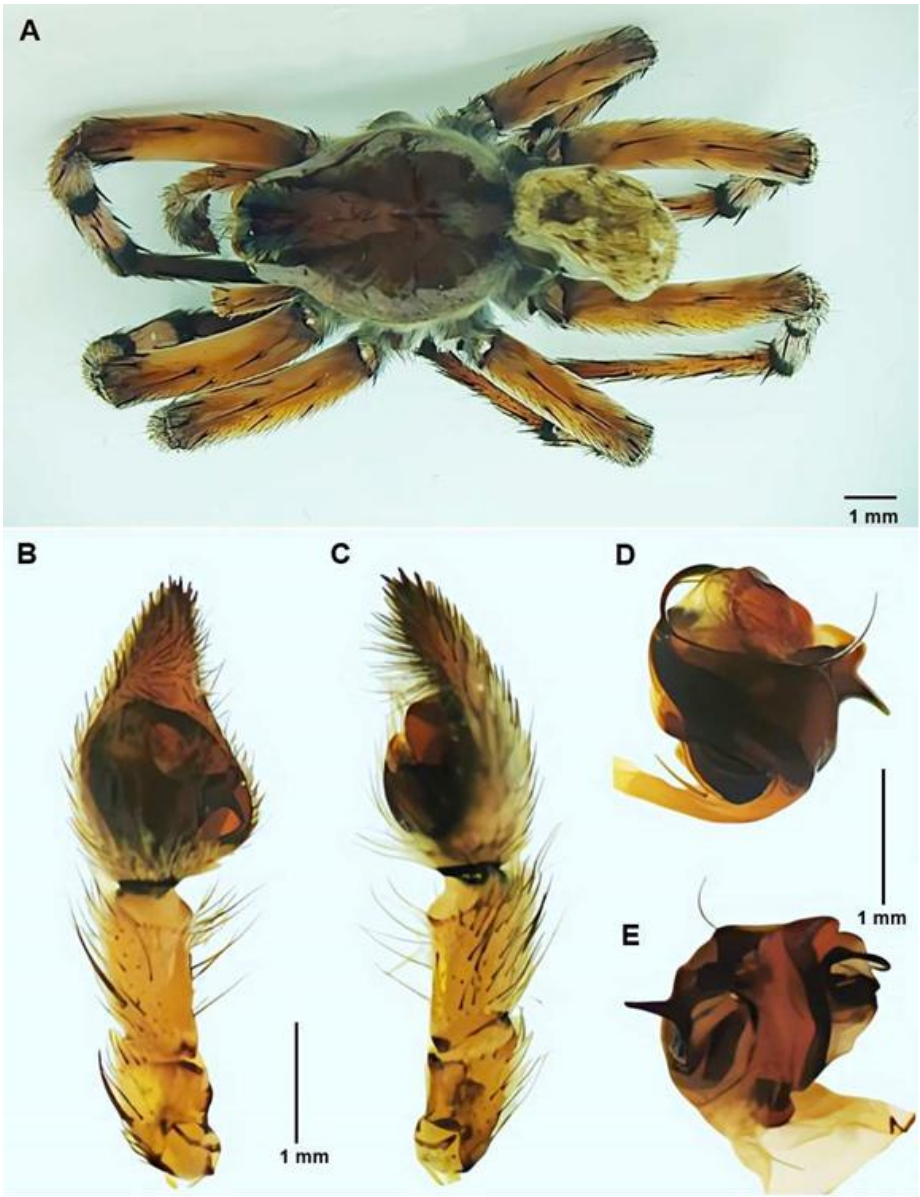


Plate (4): *Lycosa piochardi* Simon, 1876- male; (A) Habitus in dorsal view, (B–E), Left palp: B. ventral view. C: Retrolateral view. D-E: Bulb, (D) ventral view, (E) Pro-retrolateral view.

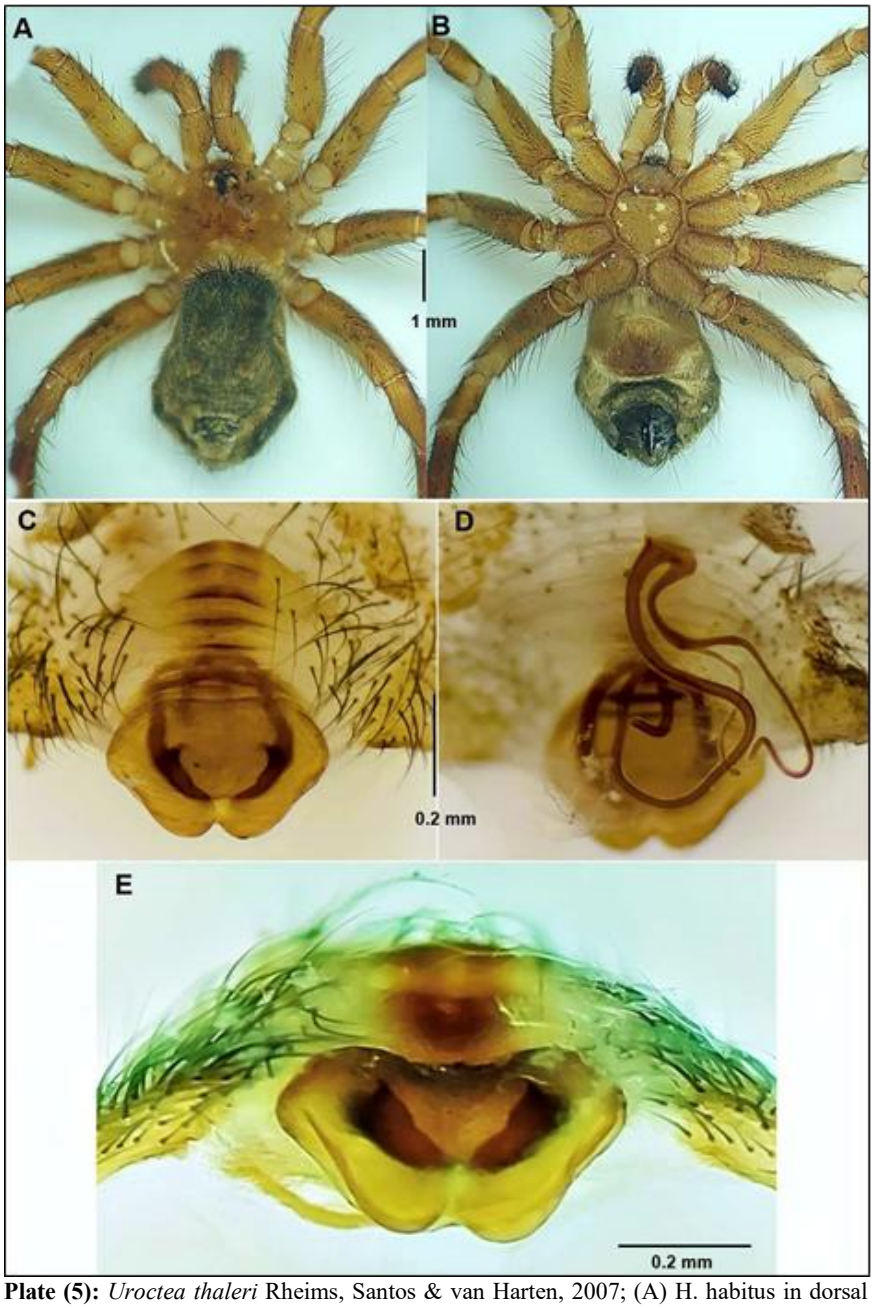


Plate (5): *Uroctea thaleri* Rheims, Santos & van Harten, 2007; (A) H. habitus in dorsal view, (B) H. habitus in ventral view, (C-E) E. epigyne, C. ventral view, D. vulva, dorsal view, E. Lower view.

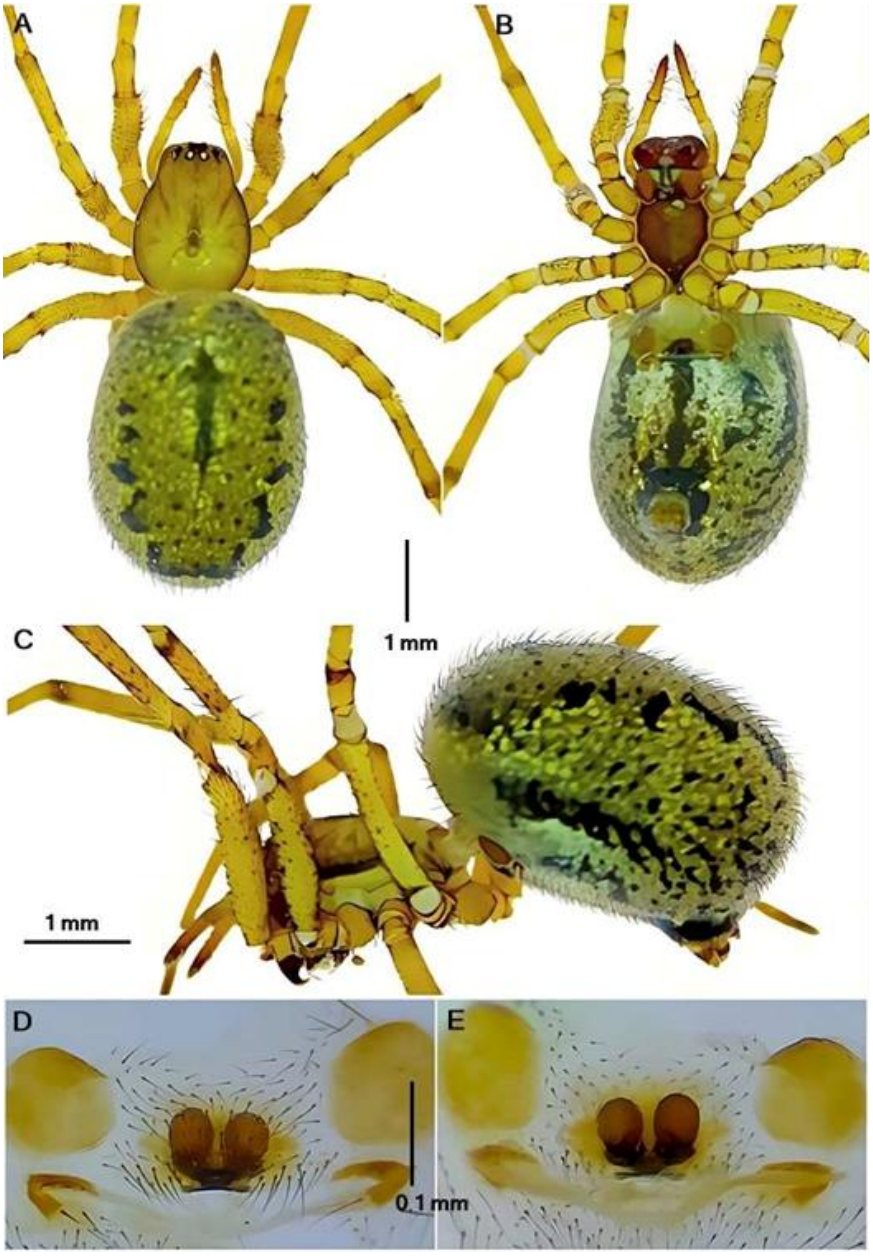


Plate (6): *Enoplognatha macrochelis* Levy & Amitai, 1981- female; (A) Habitus, dorsal view, (B) Habitus, ventral view, (C) Habitus, lateral view, (D-E) Epigyne: D. Ventral view, E. Vulva, dorsal view.

Plate (7): *Latrodectus dahli* Levi, 1959-female; (A) Habitus, dorsal view, (B) Habitus, ventral view.

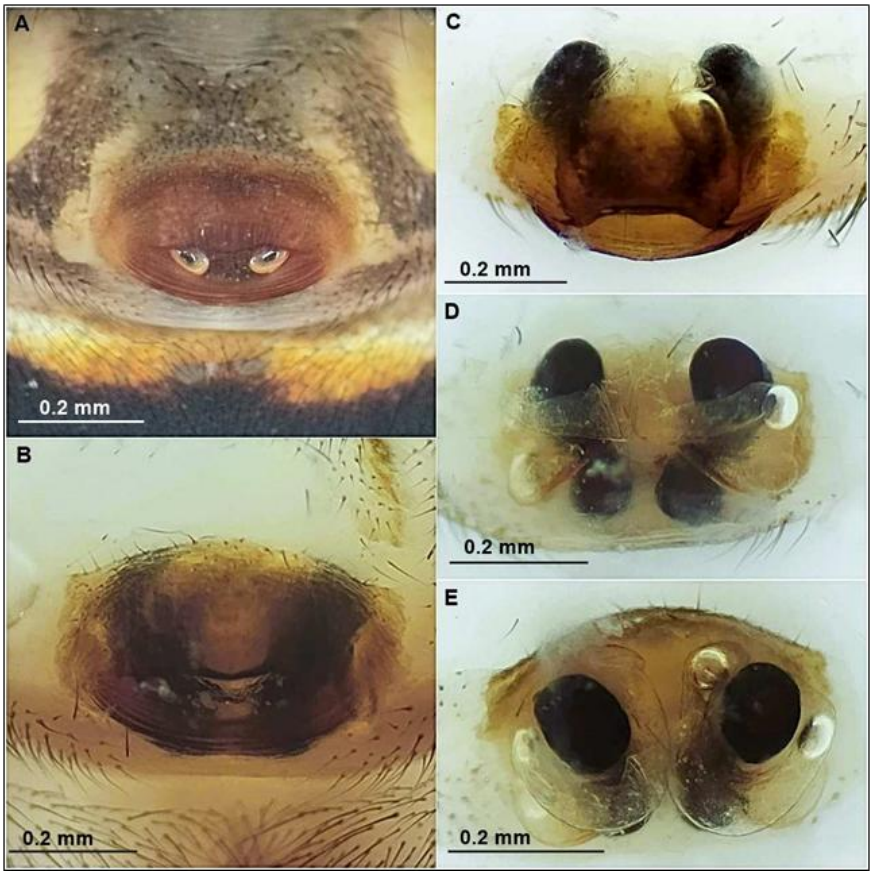


Plate (8): Epigyne of *Latrodectus dahli* Levi, 1959; (A) Intact, ventral view, (B) Separated ventral view, (C) Macerated, ventral view, (D) Vulva, dorsal view, (E) Vulva, top view.

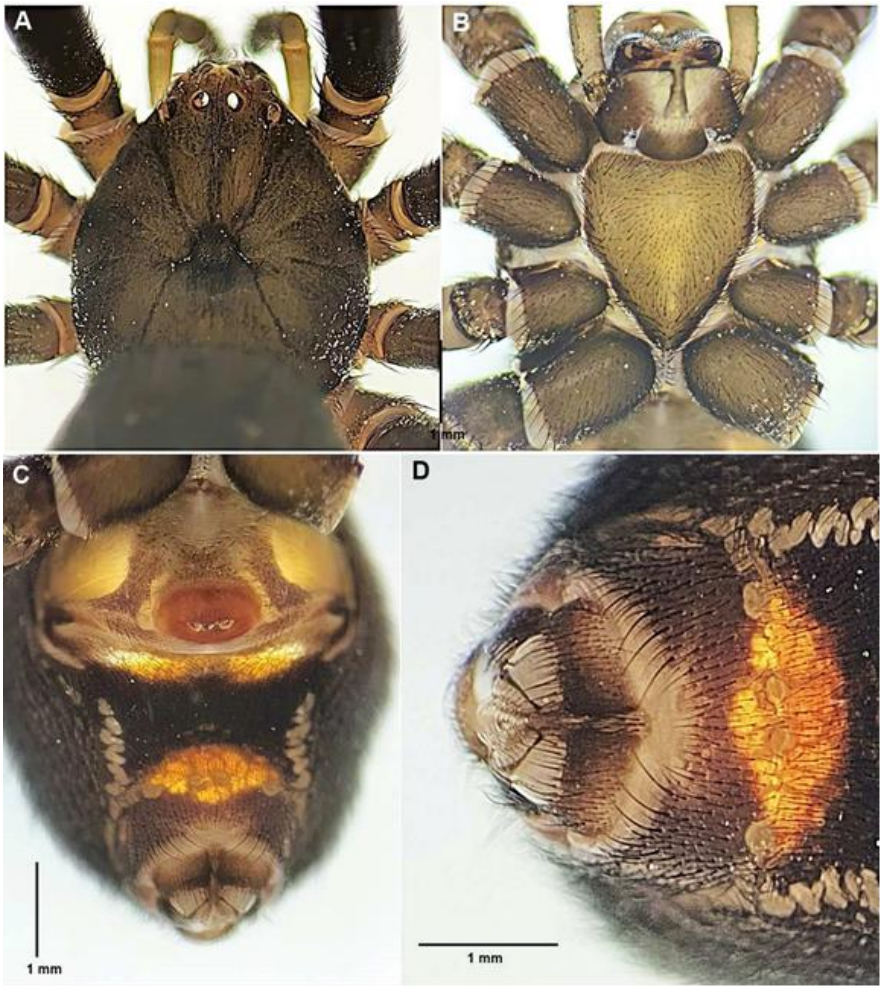


Plate (9): *Latrodectus dahli* Levi, 1959- female, (A) Carapace, (B) Prosoma, ventral view, (C) Abdomen, ventral view, (D) Spinnerets.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

"The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest".

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إسهامات تصنيفية وفاونية للعناكب في العراق (Araneae)

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الخلاصة

قَدَّمَت هذه الدراسة إسهامات تصنيفية وفاونية للعناكب في العراق (رتبة Araneae)، حيث أسفرت عن توثيق بيانات جديدة لتواجد عدد من الأنواع، مع توسيع نطاق توزيعها المعروف داخل البلاد. اذ سُجِّلَ النوع *Enoplognatha macrochelis* Levy & Amitai, 1981 (Theridiidae) لأول مرة من جنوب العراق. كما تم توثيق الأنواع التالية:

Hersiliola babylonica Zamani & Marusik, 2022 (Hersiliidae)

Lycosa piochardi Simon, 1876 (Lycosidae)

Uroctea thaleri Rheims, Santos & van Harten, 2007 (Oecobiidae)

Latrodectus dahli Levi, 1959 (Theridiidae)

مع اعطاء بيانات توزيع محدثة لها في العراق، وقد تضمنت الدراسة توثيقًا (صوريا) تفصيليًا للعينات المفحوصة، بما في ذلك اعضاء الجماع لجميع الأنواع المسجلة، دعمًا لدقة التشخيص وتعزيزًا للدراسات المقارنة المستقبلية.