

## Distribution of the Katipo Spiders (Araneae: Theridiidae) of New Zealand

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The Katipo spider *Latrodectus katipo* (Powell, 1870) is well known in New Zealand but the related "Black katipo" *L. atritus* (Urquhart, 1889) is also commonly found in the North Island.

### *Latrodectus katipo*

Body of female 6 to 8.5 mm in length. Intense glossy black in colour, with bright orange or orange-red or red longitudinal stripe. Legs up to 32 mm fully extended. Male 4 mm. Eggs pink at first, becoming purple in final stages of development.

This dangerously venomous spider occurs along the West Coast of the North Island from Wellington to north of Wanganui, New Plymouth and Waitara and is sporadic in its appearance further north. It occurs irregularly along the East Coast including Great Barrier Island.

These spiders have been found as far south as Greymouth on the West Coast and Dunedin on the East Coast of the South Island.

### *Latrodectus atritus*

Body of female 8-12 mm, usually intense glossy black with legs which may extend to 41 mm. Males 4-5 mm. Eggs purple, cream, dark brown, light-brown.

Colour variations may be present in some colonies of *L. atritus* and they may have a red stripe on the dorsal surface of abdomen of the adult female. *L. atritus* does not however display the bright orange or orange-red dorsal stripe normally seen in *L. katipo*. On rare occasions, *L. atritus* may be entirely brown and such specimens may have a rather dull red or yellow dorsal stripe on the abdomen, or occasionally none at all. *L. atritus* found between New Plymouth and Waitara is often black with a brown abdomen and some of these may have cream-coloured spots on the dorsal surface, or they may even be brown with a black abdomen. In both species the ventral "hourglass" markings may be red, pale red, considerably reduced or even absent, the black katipo often being found with no central red patch.

This poisonous spider has been found in Wanganui in very small numbers, but it occurs along the North Taranaki coast and there are indications that it occurs along the West Coast and East Coast of the northern North Island as far south as Cape Kidnappers.

The black katipo is found on beaches and in sand-dune, and sometimes pasture vegetation near the coast. Specimens found further inland were probably introduced accidentally from collected drift-wood or by some unknown means. However, they have been found on banks, in the space (occupied by marram grass roots), the sand subsequently removed through erosion. They are also found under ridges and on rare occasions spin an aerial web of up to one metre in length. All other habitats are similar to those of *L. katipo*.

### REFERENCES

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