

# Theridiidae: *Episinus*

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*Episinus* is found worldwide and is relatively species rich in N. C. and S. America but extremely poorly known from the Caribbean. *Episinus* currently counts about 40 extant species in the Americas. The fossil record of *Episinus* is exceptional with nearly 40 described species in Dominican, Chiapas, and Baltic amber. The group was revised by Levi, with species richness likely underestimated. Only 6-8 species are known from the Caribbean, plus a couple of widespread American species. Widespread species such as *E. erythrophthalmus* likely represent species complexes. I expect the group is diverse in the Caribbean, however, no island has been well sampled.



Fig. 1. Distribution of the *Episinus*, extracted from Platnick (2011). Two 'widespread species' occur in the Caribbean, both may represent a complex of related species.

**Monophyly.** Monophyly is untested. I suspect there are two main groups which I will be approximately monophyletic, (1) the relatively large bodied *E. angulatus* and relatives, and (2) the small bodied forms (majority of 'Episinus'). No molecular tests of these groups have been made.

**Amber species.** Five *Episinus* species are known from Dominican amber, two from Chiapas amber, and over 30 from Baltic amber. Fossils I have seen appear similar to extant species.

**Dispersal.** *Episinus* spiders are probably somewhat intermediate dispersers. They are known from some isolated islands and are documented ballooning. Their distribution in the Caribbean is unknown.

**Search strategy.** Most species are fairly small (2-6 mm body length), some are larger (~10 mm). *Episinus* make **SIMPLE LINE WEBS** (Fig. 2) and often 'hang out' on single lines. They are readily collected by visual search at night, and beating during day. **AERIAL SEARCH AT NIGHT, BEATING**

**Similar genera.** Can be confused with other theridiinae spiders, especially males on single lines at night. Also, *Spintharus* makes identical webs, but they are relatively rare. Best to collect all theridiids.

**Needed collecting.** All areas are in need of new collecting, especially for DNA-ready material. The Caribbean islands, in particular, are virtually unknown. Sampling from continents is necessary for biogeographical questions.

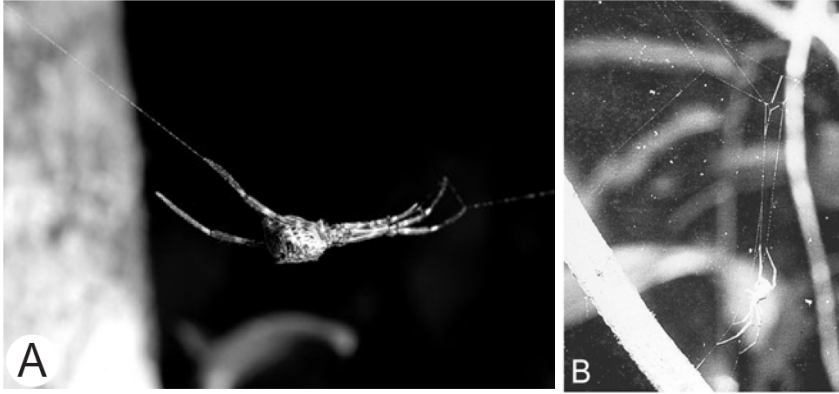


Fig. 2. A, *Episinus* sp. in web. B, *E. cognatus* female (photo W. Eberhard). Typical webs are H shaped with four lines, held in each of legs I and IV as seen in *E. cognatus*. Individuals are often found also on single lines.

### References

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