

## LIVING WITH SCORPIONS IN THE SOUTHWEST DESERT OF ARIZONA

By Peter Bigfoot

Here are some things you should know to avoid suffering from the legendary sting of the bark scorpion.

There are three main types of scorpions in this region -- the giant desert hairy, the rock scorpion and the bark scorpion. The giant desert hairy is the Hollywood-sized creature about 4 inches long and three times the size of the rock scorpion. The rock scorpion looks similar to the giant except that it is not hairy and is much smaller. Both will have their tails strung out behind them or up over their back in the classic scorpion pose. These two scorpions are mostly found out in the wild wandering around in the dark or hiding under rocks or brush in the daytime. They will be on the ground and under cover. All scorpions are most active in hot weather. We are going focus most of our attention now on the bark scorpion. Venomous bites are one of biggest concerns of people living in the desert, and you are about to see why.

The mature bark scorpion is about the same length as the rock scorpion, approximately two-and-a-half inches long, but only half the weight. The bark scorpion looks frail by comparison, but the power of its sting more than compensates for its lack of size. The bark scorpion is the one found mostly around your home and yard. They wander around at night then hide in the daytime. They seem to like woodpiles and storage sheds the best. When they hang out under something they will most often cling to the under side of this object so we are more likely to get stung when lifting this object. These scorpions are also the ones more likely to sleep in unattended clothing or a towel in your house, and they fit secretly in very small cracks and crevasses. At night they may be wandering around on the floor so it is best to wear something on your feet to protect you from a sting on the foot. Keep in mind that one could be hiding in your footwear as well, including sandals up under the straps, so shaking out your shoes is a good idea if you are in scorpion territory.

The bark scorpions start out live born clinging to their mother's back until they are big enough to go off on their own. At that time they are about ½" long and nearly orange in color. As they get larger they get lighter in color and at full size are sort of a faded, orange straw color. To make them even more troublesome, the bark scorpion will often rap its tail around to one side making it difficult to recognize. To distinguish between the "bark" and the "rock" notice their tails; the "rock" tail segments are short and thick compared to the "bark" whose tail segments are much longer and thinner.



Bark scorpion

area. It roams around the whole body. As the poison spreads so does the pain and suffering. The

The sting of the rock scorpion feels a bit like some one pushing a lit cigarette into your skin. From my experience of living in the wild for the past 30 years and having been stung almost as many times (29), I tell you without doubt that while the sting of the rock scorpion is unpleasant it remains local; the pain, tingling, and numbness along with a little redness and swelling subside in a few hours. It may remain numb for a few days. The sting of the giant scorpion is about the same. The sting of the bark scorpion starts out about the same and gets much worse from there. This poison does not stay local. There is no redness or swelling but the classic tingling and numbness remain near the site of the bite. However, the poison does not stay in the bite

heart and lungs may feel threatened as the process moves into what I call restless agitation. At this point the victim hurts all over and no matter how they sit, stand or lay they cannot get comfortable, but will most likely be lying down by this time all agitated and painful. The acute symptoms usually last 12 hours or more and then taper for possibly up to 30 days.

It's important to be aware that it makes a difference where we get stung. The worst places to get stung are where the nerve endings are close to the skin, such as the hands and feet (the most likely places to get stung); armpits are very bad also. If you get stung in a fleshy area like a leg or back the symptoms seem to be greatly reduced. These types of bites have felt to me like twitching, like a scorpion running up and down under the victim's skin. It is creepy, yes, but so much less suffering than a sting to the hands or feet. If untreated these symptoms usually last about 12 hours.

My experience shows that treatments of bites favor those who use natural remedies. The first one I discovered was a poultice of freshly chewed up cottonwood tree leaves. The leaves taste terrible, but it works. I have also used aspen tree leaves, prickly pear cactus, and creosote bush leaves, mashed and mixed with mud. My favorite remedy is made from an extract of the western mugwort plant and is available through Reevis Mountain Remedies ([www.reevismountain.org](http://www.reevismountain.org)). While these remedies are very simple they are also very effective. "Trust in nature" has always been my adage.

Peter Bigfoot, of Reevis Mountain School, has authored, along with other books, "Natural Remedies for Bites and Stings". He teaches native herbology and natural healing at Reevis Mountain School. He has found several effective remedies for these painful stings.

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