

BOGDIVERSITY THURSDAY



—*from Head Naturalist Clinton*

Fishing Spiders

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While it might be February based on the calendar, the unseasonably warm winter we are having has made it hard to think about winter active species in the Sax-Zim Bog. This week, while the species group we will explore are primarily active during the warm season in the bog, you can find members of this species active during the winter months as well! Today, let's take a look at the Fishing Spiders!

The genus *Dolomedes* contains fairly large, charismatic spiders known as the Fishing Spiders. These spiders get their name from their close association with aquatic ecosystems and their choice of prey: aquatic insects and terrestrial insects that fall into the water. While it might be fun to think of these spiders as actively fishing, with small fishing poles and lures, they very seldomly capture fish (though it has been documented!). Fishing spiders are primarily nocturnal, preferring to hide near the water, with some exceptions. In Minnesota, there are four species of fishing spider, all of which occur in the Sax-Zim Bog.

Like most large spiders, fishing spiders are active predators, as opposed to web-builders. They have rather large, forward facing eyes that help them detect prey, similar to other active spiders like Jumping Spiders and Wolf Spiders. Fishing spiders also have an amazing sense of touch, sensing vibrations on the surface of the water to help detect struggling prey. This adaptation is similar to web-making spiders! Their legs are covered in very sensitive and hydrophobic hairs, that is, hairs that structurally repel water allowing them to walk on the surface of the water. You might find these spiders skimming around the surface of the water along the edge of a lake, small stream, or pond.

Folks who have spent time in the Northwoods also know that these spiders are not just at home in the water, but might take just as much comfort in your outhouse! Dark Fishing Spider (*Dolomedes tenebrosus*) is one of, if not the largest, spider in Minnesota. As a fishing spider, it does spend time near water, but often is found well away from water, especially on old buildings or in outhouses. These beautiful spiders are no risk to humans, even if they might scare us a little!

Fishing Spiders are members of the family Pisauridae, a group of spiders called the Nursery Web Spiders. This group of spiders gets its name from the female care given to eggs and spiderlings. Female members of Pisauridae build special webs to protect their young and guard them from potential predators. We don't often think of spiders when considering parental care, but female spiders are really great parents to their young.

As with most insects and spiders, knowing Latin names can be quite useful in understanding species diversity. For example, if we consider the common names of the Fishing Spiders in Minnesota our list would include: Dark Fishing Spider, 6-spotted Fishing Spider, Striped Fishing Spider, and Striped Fishing Spider. Yes, you read that correctly, we have two different fishing spiders with the same common name! However, if we consider the same spider's Latin names, our list would include: *Dolomedes tenebrosus*, *Dolomedes triton*, *Dolomedes scriptus*, and *Dolomedes striatus*. It is a little confusing, I know, but many entomologists or arachnologists have little use for common names as there is a lot of extra information found in the Latin names of a species.

More information about these amazing spiders can be found with the photos included below!

(Photos of *Dolomedes tenebrosus* and *D. striatus* by Head Naturalist Clinton; Photos of *D. scriptus* and *D. triton* by Sparky Stensaas)



The 6-spotted Fishing Spider (*Dolomedes triton*) is often our first encounter with fishing spiders. They are quite common, especially near boat landings or in lily pad laden lakes. These beautiful spiders are named for the six spots on each side of the abdomen.



Dark Fishing Spider (*Dolomedes tenebrosus*) is an amazing spider! They are huge spiders, with leg spans reaching beyond 3 inches! Of the fishing spiders, they are most likely to be found well away from water, preferring old buildings, sheds, and outhouses to lake edges.



Very similar in size to Dark Fishing Spider is the larger Striped Fishing Spider, *Dolomedes scriptus*. This spider is sometimes quite difficult to ID against *D. tenebrosus*, but often includes abundant white markings across and adjacent to the abdomen and thorax.



The last member of the genus to consider today is also called Striped Fishing Spider, *Dolomedes scriptus*! This is also the most likely member of this genus to be seen during the winter months. Head Naturalist Clinton has seen this spider a few times during the winter, primarily in late February and early March.