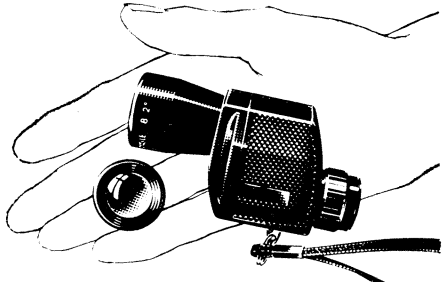


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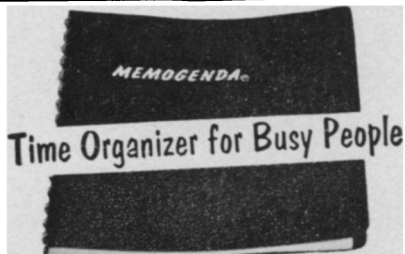
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SELENOCOSMIA CRASSIPES

nature note



Australian News and Information Bureau

Barking Spider

The giant barking spider of Australia does not really bark—but it does bite. Its fangs hold enough poison to kill a chicken, as well as its more usual prey of frogs, birds and small reptiles.

This strange spider produces its barking sounds by rubbing stiff bristly structures on its powerful jaws against peg-like structures on the maxilla or mouthparts. Actually no spider has a true voice. They have various stridulating organs in different parts of the body, such as a series of bristles rubbing against ridges on parts of the legs or jaws. In many species, these moving parts are found on the male, but not on the female. Usually such spiders produce noises that cannot be heard by the human ear, but some buzz like a bee or purr like a cat.

The bark has been described as resembling the noise made by drawing the back of a knife against the edge of a small comb or by pouring small shot onto a plate from a height of a few inches. Scientists do not yet know what purpose this sound serves, although some believe it may be a defense mechanism, perhaps a threat to warn off intruders.

The barking spider, *Selenocosmia*

crassipes, is a member of the burrow-making spiders, a family called Theraphosidae. They are about five to six inches over all with a head and body the size of a mouse, and eight large legs covered with tufts of reddish-gold hair.

They dig deep winding burrows into hard arid soil, sometimes as long as two feet and about an inch to two inches in diameter. The female spider spins her eggs into a silken cocoon and places the sac at the bottom of the burrow. Here the babies hatch, remain with her for a few months, then go off by themselves to dig individual homes.

During the day, the barking spiders seem almost in a state of torpor. At night, however, they creep out of their burrows and move softly about in search of food. They pounce upon their prey, kill or paralyze it with poison and drag it back to the burrow either for immediate eating or for storage.

Many people think spiders are insects, but they really belong to the separate class Arachnida, along with scorpions, mites and ticks. One easy way of telling the difference is that spiders have eight legs, and all insects have six.