

The Indian theraphosid status puzzle

The South Asian Invertebrate Specialist Group (SAsISG), as part of its 2021–2025 quadrennium, Target 010, 'Complete global Red List assessments of 60 Tarantula species of India by 2025' assessed 60 species of Theraphosidae spiders (AKA tarantulas) endemic to India as per the 'IUCN Red List of Threatened Species' guidelines in a three-day workshop at Coimbatore, India on 19–21 July 2024.

The workshop had 12 subject experts, Abinesh A., Arjun Viswa, Aswathy S., Bhargavi Srinivasulu, Chelmala Srinivasulu, Gautam Kadam, Harshil Patel, Moinudheen, Rakesh Kumar Mohalik, Sanjay Molur, Shouvik Mali, and Souvik Sen; a GIS specialist, Nishanth Srinivas; and 10 fellows from the Ram



Hattikudur Advanced Training in Conservation – Maitreyi Hegde, Nilesh Murmu, Paridhi Modi, Pooja Patil, Shivaani A. Swaathi NA, Tandrili Baruah, Trisa Bhattacharjee, Vardhini S., and Usha Ravindra. Sanjay Molur facilitated the 3-day workshop and along with Chelmala Srinivasulu facilitated the working groups while the rest of the workshop team participated as contributors and/or as assessors.

The 60 species were assessed tentatively as follows: 4

Critically Endangered, 11 Endangered, 5 Vulnerable, 19 Data Deficient, 4 Near Threatened, and 14 Least Concern. Three were Not Evaluated. One-third of the tarantula species in India are threatened with extinction. Most common threats for the species were road expansion, soil extraction, persecution, pet trade, habitat degradation, landslides, and flooding. Tentatively, the Western Ghats & Sri Lanka, Himalaya, Indo-Burma, and Sundaland hotspots hosted 17, 7, 4, and 1 species, respectively. This is the first time that 46 species were assessed and 14 species were reassessed after 16 years. Of the 14 species reassessed, the status of seven species remains unchanged. Of the remaining

Poecilotheria hanumavilasumica. © B. Ravichandran.



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seven, three were downlisted (*Poecilotheria metallica*, *P. miranda*, & *Thrigmopoeus truculentus*), three were uplisted (*Poecilotheria regalis*, *P. tigrinawesseli*, & *Thrigmopoeus insignis*), and one species is synonymised (*Poecilotheria nallamallaensis* with *P. formosa*).

Of the 60 species, at least three species were taxonomically uncertain hence were recommended for further research. Research on population size, distribution, trends, life history, and ecology were recommended to all species due to non-availability of information on these factors. Most of the papers on checklists were not considered for the assessment due to no clarity on the taxonomy and specimen identity. The distribution records from predatory papers were not considered. The information considered for Red list assessment were solely based on the data collated from all published papers and from the experts'

personal communications on their unpublished distributional records and observations from their surveys, after considerable debate on the validity of the species and its occurrence. A more detailed and definite report will be published in the coming issue.

This assessment is crucial to understand the risk of extinction in these lesser known and most ignored invertebrate groups, and to mobilize conservation focused research work for the threatened and 'Data Deficient' species.

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Poecilotheria metallica. © Sanjay Molur.

