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On two *Liphistius* species (Araneae: Liphistiidae) from Laos

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Abstract

Two mesothelid trapdoor spider species, *Liphistius isan* Schwendinger, 1998 and *L. laoticus* sp. n., are reported from southern Laos, east of the Mekong River. *Liphistius isan* was previously known only from the type locality in northeastern Thailand, and it is here also reported from a second Thai locality. *Liphistius laoticus* sp. n. is newly described from males and females. The two species belong to distinct lineages and they both have their closest relatives in northeastern Thailand. Information on biology and relationships of these two species is given.

Key words: taxonomy, Arachnida, Mesothelae, trapdoor spiders

Introduction

Forty-eight *Liphistius* species and one subspecies are currently known: 31 of them from Thailand, 14 from peninsular Malaysia, one from both these countries, two from Myanmar and one from the Indonesian island of Sumatra (Platnick 2013). To date, no *Liphistius* have been reported from Indochina (Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam), but as several species in Thailand occur very close to its border with Laos and Cambodia, the same species are most certainly also present on the other side of the frontiers. The type locality of *L. dangrek* Schwendinger, 1996 lies only about 15 km from the “Emerald Triangle” where Thailand, Cambodia and Laos meet, and conspecific spiders were recently also found further west, only about 3 km from the Thai–Cambodian border. *Liphistius* juveniles recently collected by Siegfried Huber near Siem Reap, in Cambodia, may also belong to this species. A second *Liphistius* (close to *L. tenuis* Schwendinger) has meanwhile been discovered 1–2 km from that border in southeastern Thailand. *Liphistius dangrek* probably also occurs across the Laotian border, in the western part of Champasak Province. Another *Liphistius* was found in the mountains of northern Thailand, only a few hundred metres away from the border with the Laotian province of Xaignaburi (= Sainyabuli). All previously known *Liphistius* localities lie west of the Mekong (Fig. 1), suggesting that this river (the largest in Southeast Asia, about 4350 km long) is a barrier that delimits the geographical range of the genus in the east.

During a short holiday trip to southern Laos in 1996, I found *Liphistius* on the Bolaven Plateau, east of the Mekong. Several years later, I returned to that country for a more systematic search for mesothelid spiders and visited 15 localities in the mountains and lowlands of northern (provinces Luang Prabang, Oudomxai and Luang Namtha), central (provinces Vientiane, Bolikhamxai and Khammouan) and southern Laos (eastern part of Champasak Province). I found the same species as in 1996 at a second locality near the first on the Bolaven Plateau, plus an additional species in the lowlands further south, not far from the Laotian–Cambodian border (Fig. 1, localities 1 and 2c). However, I found no traces (not even empty burrows) of mesothelid spiders at the other localities in central and northern Laos. While this is no proof of the absence of such spiders in these parts of the country, it suggests that if they are present they are uncommon. It should also be noted that a much more extensive arachnological survey of Laos by Peter Jäger and Laotian co-workers has not yet uncovered any mesothelid spiders (Jäger *et al.* 2012; P. Jäger pers. comm.).