

Palgrave resident warning others after finding Northern Black Widow spider in backyard

By Zachary Roman

A Caledon resident had an unexpected visit from an eight-legged guest lately.

Greg Sullivan, who lives in Palgrave, found a Northern Black Widow Spider in his backyard last week.

He was taking a tarp off of a cement mixer he had in storage when he saw a spider move by his hands. After taking some pictures of it and doing research, he determined the spider's species. Alongside the Northern Black Widow, he also found what he thought was an egg sac.

Sullivan said he wanted to let people know the spiders could be around since they do not seem to appear too often in Caledon. He said the last he remembers, someone found one in 2007 in Bolton.

According to a paper published by Katherine Dugas from the department of entomology at The Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station, Northern Black Widow spiders are easy to identify.

Female Black Widows have a half-inch long body (one and a half-inch including legs) and are a glossy black colour. They have a red hourglass on the underside of their abdomen that's broken in the middle. Male spiders are marked similarly and are smaller.

Dugas said Black Widows can be found in natural shelters like hollow stumps and rock piles, and they prefer dark, closed-in areas with lots of attachment points for their webs. They can be found in underused sheds, greenhouses, garages and attic spaces. They're timid and will usually flee when disturbed.

Symptoms of Black Widow spider bites include pain and abdominal cramping that leads to "intense, systemic pain." According to Dugas, sweating, nausea, vomiting, and tremors can also occur.

If bitten, one should immediately seek medical attention and apply a cold compress to the wound site, said Dugas.

According to Michigan State University, there is a less than one per cent mortality rate from Black Widow bites, with most occurring in children.

"From now on, I'm wearing gloves when I'm working in the garage," said Sullivan. "I'd hate to find out some kid was running around and walks up and touches it because it's pretty."

Sullivan encouraged Caledon residents to be careful when in spaces where Northern Black Widows could be.