

Al Asad au Natural

Contributed by Major Randall Rogers

Yellow sac spiders are found around the world and are present in Iraq. They are one of two spiders venomous enough to be dangerous to humans on Al Asad. Named for the silk sack they spin to contain their eggs and their pale yellow color, sac spiders are about 1/4" long and with legs are about the size of a quarter. They generally live outside, but as the temperature cools down this fall they will also move inside. For this reason you should shake out any clothing or duffelbags that have sat in one place for a while, and watch for silk "tents" to form in corners and along the edge of the ceiling. These guys are very common, even in our houses in the States, and one scientist has estimated that this is the spider most often swallowed while you sleep! I don't know if that is true, but I do know that they can give a nasty bite, similar to a Brown recluse. Spider bites do not hurt at first, but soon become painful and swollen as the tissue around the bite dies. Some victims can suffer anaphylactic shock. Although a spider bite is seldom life threatening, it can be a serious injury, especially if you are allergic. LTC Gouhin found one at the office!



Photo courtesy of University of Nebraska

Who's Living Under My CHU?

The Turkestan Roach Not only are these guys under our CHUs, but they are also invading the U.S.! Starting with the 1st Gulf War, this species has hitched a ride with soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, & now are invasive from CA to FL. Males are 1" long and have wings, females are wingless. Being thin shelled (easy to digest & high meat-to-shell ratio) and fast breeding, they are raised as pet food and are sold on the internet for \$.50 to \$1.50 each. Downside—they lay multiple egg cases and can spread disease.

Bats in Iraq

Nearly one-fifth of all the types of mammals in Iraq are bats. Iraq is home to at least 20 different species! Bats are a critical link in the environment, controlling insects and pollinating a number of night-blooming plants. Most bats eat small insects, but others eat fruit and still others are vampires, biting a small cut into an animal in order to drink the blood. In Iraq nearly all the bats eat insects, the exception being the Egyptian fruit bat. Although largely beneficial and harmless, bats also pose a few of health risks. For one, bats are especially susceptible to rabies, which they can pass either thru a bite or thru inhalation in extremely confined areas. Bat dens can also build up toxic levels of ammonia and the accumulated guano on the floor can cause disease or host biting insects. It has recently been established that the Egyptian fruit bat carries the flesh-eating Marburg virus. Most bats spend the day in a communal den, which can be under the eaves of a building, the cracks between concrete barriers, or a hollow tree. Other bats will hang in trees, and some also live solo lives. Bats hunt at night using echolocation—they emit high pitched noises and triangulate the return echos from even the smallest of objects with great accuracy. Most of the bats of Iraq are very common, but some species are endangered, usually due to the effects of habitat destruction & pesticides. Look for them at dusk!

Questions from the field... your questions answered!

What Kind of Skull is This?

Golden Jackal. This skull was found in the ASP at GTQ and was thought to be from a Striped Hyena. Only about 7" long, it appears a little small at least for an adult hyena, and the wear on the teeth do indicate this was from an adult animal. To positively identify it, it was necessary to study the dental pattern. Each side of this upper set of teeth has 3 incisors, 1 canine, 4 pre-molars, and 2 molars, matching the dentate of the Golden jackal. The Striped Hyena would have had one less molar. Teeth can often tell about the type of animal, it's health, and age. The dollar in the photo shows scale, an aid in identification.



Photo courtesy of Army Chief Warrant Officer David Rohrbacher