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BIODIVERSITY OF SPIDERS OF THE BLACK ROCK FOREST

At a State level the spiders of New York State are very poorly known. The last list of New York State spiders was completed by Crosby and Bishop in 1928 and it included 174 genera and 576 species. Kaston (1981) in his book "Spiders of Connecticut" recorded 184 genera and 462 species of spiders from Connecticut State, and 224 genera and 597 species from adjunct territories of Connecticut State. This example shows that the spider fauna of a much smaller state, Connecticut, is currently represented by more species than there are in the whole of New York State. Obviously, this poor state of knowledge needs to be addressed. As a result, our arachnological research in Black Rock Forest (BRF) has become the first spider survey for the last 70 years and in three years of the project development we have found 290 species of spiders in BRF. The data generated in the project are used as a general manual for teaching biodiversity to high school students at the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) and are also studied in the new distance learning course "The Study of Spiders" created by the AMNH for high school teachers. The teachers and students are studying spiders using Internet connections and all field classes are based on the data from the BRF. An important aspect of BRF project is a creation of the database driven web site (http://research.amnh.org/entomology/blackrock).