

## On the trail of sting tailed arachnids

by Lowvelder Correspondent  
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NELSPRUIT - The National Lowveld Botanical Garden had a record turnout for this month's nature talk and walk on scorpions presented by self-taught expert and author, Mr Jonathan Leeming.

According to this man, who has what seems to be an unhealthy obsession with scorpions and Parktown prawns, he was a very disturbing child who grew up in England. "I was one of those who used to turn over every rock I could find, just to see what was underneath it. I came to South Africa in 1984 because there are far more interesting and bigger creepy crawlies to be found and I just never left."

Leeming had his audience enthralled as he showed slide after slide of the various scorpion species in South Africa, where they live, what they eat and how one should handle them. Scorpions live in arid and tropical areas, on the ground, under rocks or up in trees. "It is very difficult to identify them because they don't have as many unique markings as other animals do and they don't have common names. We use only the scientific names."

The easiest way to identify one of the 158 scorpion species that are found in Southern Africa is to identify their habitat, whether they are tree- or ground-dwellers. According to Leeming not all scorpions have the same intensity of venom even though it is all neurotoxic. "Speaking from experience, a scorpion sting is very painful." Leeming has been stung 14 times! "But scorpion stings very rarely kill people. The rule of thumb with scorpions is the bigger the pincers and the smaller the tail, the less poisonous the creature. Scorpions with large tails and small pincers are very dangerous. The easiest way to avoid being stung is to leave them alone."

Catching scorpions is one of Leeming's passions and after the talk he took the audience out on a scorpion hunt. They walked through particularly rocky areas of the garden, turning over every stone to see what was underneath. This is the easiest way to find the stingers. It wasn't long before an *Opistacanthus* scorpion, which occurs in the eastern areas of Southern Africa, was found.

These creatures are ordinarily very docile in temperament and rarely use their sting in defence. Members of the audience were allowed to hold the scorpion and really get to know it before it was returned to its rocky outcrop. To find out more about Leeming and his friends the scorpions, visit his website at [www.scorpions.co.za](http://www.scorpions.co.za)

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