



On Old World ninetines spiders (Araneae: Pholcidae), with a new genus and species and the first record for Madagascar

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Abstract

Ninetines (Pholcidae: Ninetinae) are tiny spiders, largely restricted to arid habitats where they lead reclusive lives under objects close to the soil. They are rare in collections and poorly known in any respect. Only two genera were previously known from the Old World, the monotypic *Mystes* Bristowe from Malaysia, and *Ninetis* Simon, with four described species ranging from Yemen to Namibia. Here we describe a new genus from Egypt and Uzbekistan, represented by a single new species, *Nita elsaff* **n. gen., n. sp.** Based on ultrastructural data and cladistic analysis we hypothesize that this species is more closely related to some largely New World ninetines (*Chisosa* Huber from Baja California and Texas, *Aucana* Huber from Chile and New Caledonia) than to *Ninetis*. We also describe the first *Ninetis* species from Madagascar (*N. toliara* **n. sp.**), give new records for two previously known species, and present a distribution map for *Ninetis*.

Key words: Pholcidae, Ninetinae, *Ninetis*, *Nita*, Egypt, Uzbekistan, Madagascar, taxonomy, distribution

Introduction

Due to their small size (body length usually about 1–2 mm) and their reclusive life in the leaf litter or under stones, ninetines are rare in collections. Apart from crude habitat data and the notion that *Ninetis subtilissima* Simon, 1890 runs rapidly when disturbed and builds “flimsy webs” (Huber and van Harten 2001), nothing is known about their biology. Ninetines are widely distributed and diverse in the New World (twelve described genera, ranging from Chile to the USA, revised in Huber 2000), but only two genera were previously known from the Old World: *Ninetis* Simon, 1890 from Africa and the Arabian Peninsula (Huber 2000, 2002; Huber and van Harten 2001), and the dubious and monotypic *Mystes* Bristowe from Malaysia.

The monophyly of “Ninetinae” remains controversial just as the position of ninetines within Pholcidae. Traditionally, ninetines have been considered a ‘basal’ taxon in Pholcidae (Simon 1893), and recent molecular data lend support to the hypothesis placing ninetines as sister group to all remaining pholcids (Bruvo-Madžarić *et al.* 2005). However, the sample size in this study was very limited, with only the type species of the nomenclotypical genus included (*Ninetis subtilissima*). Whether New and Old World ninetines are closely related or have independently adapted to a life in the interstices of the soil and surface layer remains an open question (Huber and Brescovit 2003).

In this note we describe a third ninetines genus from the Old World and the first ninetines from Madagascar, and we give some new records for previously described *Ninetis* species from Africa. The genus *Ninetis* now includes five species: *N. subtilissima* Simon, 1890 (Yemen), *N. minuta* (Berland, 1919) (Kenya, Somalia, Tanzania), *N. russellsmithi* Huber, 2002 (Malawi), *N. namibiae* Huber, 2000 (Namibia), and *N. toliara* **n. sp.** (Madagascar).