

Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

Daddy longlegs

Greetings and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature.

Slides, and swings are quickly forgotten when there's a daddy longlegs in the vicinity and our three-year old focuses her efforts on picking up the fragile arachnid with her tiny hands.

Though daddy longlegs are arachnids, they aren't spiders. They lack silk glands and don't have as many eyes as spiders. While a spider's two body sections are distinct, in a daddy longlegs they come together such that they give the appearance of a single-sectioned oval body.

You've likely heard stories about how the venom of a daddy longlegs is the most potent in the world, and we're saved only by the fact they're unable to bite us. It's a story that can make a father cringe when his daughter picks up one of the animals – holding in her hand enough deadly chemical to take a man down. But the story isn't true. Daddy long legs aren't venomous at all.

At some point in my daughter's handling of the hapless creature, it usually loses a leg or two, but many species of daddy longlegs drop legs in a moment of crisis, like a lizard dropping the end of its tail. Often the dropped leg continues to twitch, spurred on by nerve signals emanating from the top of the leg. Some species' legs can twitch for up to an hour, and its thought this might help divert the attention of a would-be predator.

For WNCW and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, this is Gary Peeples.