Hidden in the caves: a new troglobitic species of *Spaeleoleptes* and the type species redescription (Opiliones, Laniatores)

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Introduction


From this group of escadabids, the current work focuses on the study of the poorly known and cavernicolous species of the genus *Spaeleoleptes*. The genus was originally described by H. Soares (1966) to accommodate *Spaeleoleptes spaeleus* H. Soares, 1966, a troglobitic species collected in Lapa Nova do Maquiné cave, Cordisburgo municipality, state of Minas Gerais, in Brazil. It was originally described as a member of the polyphyletic Phalangodidae, subfamily Minuinae (= Kimulidae), but Kury (2003) asserted that the description was insufficient to provide a reliable familial assignment and considered the taxon as a Grassatores incertae sedis. The current family allocation was first proposed by Kury & Pérez-González (2007), but the authors did not provide details about the elements supporting the familial assignment nor did they provide a redescription under modern standards of opilionological taxonomy. In the original description of *Spaeleoleptes spaeleus*, Soares used highly convergent characters to identify the species, such as trolgomorphosis. Despite the relatively good illustrations of the body, leg I and pedipalp, no description or illustration of male genital structures was made, structures that are currently considered essential for the proposition of new genera and species (Martens 1976). Moreover, the examination of the genital morphology is crucial in placing taxa into families belonging to the clade Samooidea + Zalmoxoidea (Kury et al. 2016), therefore, a thorough description of *Spaeleoleptes spaeleus* including a detailed study of the male genital morphology is still missing for this species. This work, in part, will cover this deficiency in order to support their placement in Escadabidae.

Nowadays, we know that harvestmen are one of the most successful groups of animals to colonize the subterranean environment and are well represented in all categories of subterranean classification: troglloxenes, troglophiles, and troglobites (Pinto-da-Rocha 1995; Gallão & Bichuette 2016). In Brazil there are 14 troglobitic species of Laniatores harvestmen distributed in the families Cryptopodidae, Escadabidae, Gerdesiidae, Gomphastidae, and Kimulidae. *Spaeleoleptes spaeleus* was the first troglobitic harvestman species described from Brazil, paving the way for major speleological discoveries of the group (Pinto-da-Rocha 1995). Despite this, after 56 years, the species is redescribed herein for the first time, including digital images of the type material and illustrations of the male genitalia. Furthermore, the monotypy of the genus has ended with the description of a second troglobitic species, *Spaeleoleptes gimli* sp. nov., from specimens collected in a cave in Bahia State, also representing a substantial increase of the distributional range of this remarkable group of Brazilian harvestmen.

Material and methods

Description of the sampling localities

The Gruta Natal cave (Figs 1–2) is located in the the carbonatic rocks of the Una Group, in the Una-Utinga metasedimentary Basin, in the state of Bahia. The climate is semiarid, and the vegetation type is the “Caatinga” interspersed by Atlantic Forest. These carbonatic rocks are inserted in the Salitre Formation at about 600 m a.s.l. Caves in the Itaeté region present labyrinth patterns with large conduits and the presence of lakes or water bodies; some of these localities are know worldwide, such as Poço Encantado, Poço Azul de Milu, and Lapa do Bode, with intense touristic frequentation (Rubbioli et al. 2019; Pereira 2022). Gruta Natal is not visited by tourists, and is outside the protected area of Chapada Diamantina National Park, on a private property. Its surroundings are highly impacted.

Abstract

The genus *Spaeleoleptes* was proposed by H. Soares in 1966 to accommodate the first Brazilian troglobitic species of harvestmen, *Spaeleoleptes spaeleus* H. Soares, 1966. In this work, we redescribe this species, including digital images of the type material and drawings of the male genitalia. Since its description, *Spaeleoleptes* has remained monotypic, and after 56 years, herein is described the second species of the genus, *Spaeleoleptes gimli* sp. nov. Both species share sexually dimorphic characteristics: a swelling of the tibial region and swelling on the tibiae and patellae I and II; a penis with robust and robust conductors covering all or part of the capsule interna and a capsule interna with two lateral projections. They are clearly separated by the shape of the modified region of the tibia; by the apical projection on the apical lamina of the pars distalis in the pars distalis, and by the lateral projections of the capsule interna, which is flattened in *S. gimli*. *Spaeleoleptes gimli* greatly increases the distributional range of the genus, as it is now recorded from caves located in two Brazilian phytophysiognomies from the Cerrado of Minas Gerais to the Caatinga of Bahia.

Keywords: Neotropical, Zalmoxoidea, relict, sexual dimorphism, cave-dwellers.


Refereed article


*Research article*

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Fig. 2. Distribution map of Spaeleoleptes H. Soares, 1966 species. The purple circle is the Lapa Nova do Maquiné cave, locality of the type species S. spaeleus H. Soares, 1966. The yellow circle is the Gruta Natal cave, locality of the new species S. gimli sp. nov. Dark grey, karst areas. Abbreviations: MG = Minas Gerais State; BA = Bahia State.
nowadays, mainly by deforestation for plantations and pastures. It is a highly humid cave, since there is a large lake formed by phreatic waters. This lake is inhabited by the Brazilian cave catfish *Rhamdiopsis krugi*, a threatened species.

The Lapa Nova de Maquíné cave (Figs 1–2) is a limestone cave located in the Cordisburgo region, state of Minas Gerais. This cave is the scene of important scientific discoveries by the Danish paleontologist Peter Wilhelm Lund, in the second half of the 19th century. It is a cave with ca 1300 m of mapped passageways, inserted in the Bambuí Group, Lagoa do Jacaré Formation (Rubbioli et al. 2019) of the Upper Proterozoic. The local climate can be included in the tropical regime with two well-defined seasons, characteristic of the Cerrado Domain. The cave has been intensively studied by geologists and biologists. It is a touristic cave, with a speleological management plan. The main impacts are the suppression of the vegetation in the surroundings of the cave by agriculture and *Eucalyptus* forestry, as well as the artificial lighting in part of the cave (visited) that favors the growth of exotic organisms to the cave habitat. Lapa Nova do Maquiné and its immediate surroundings is a state Conservation Unit of integral protection in the category of Natural Monument, named as Peter Lund State Natural Monument in 2005.

**Specimen collection and repositories**

The material examined is deposited at the Museu de Zoologia da Universidade de São Paulo (MZUSP), Brazil, and in the collection of the Laboratório de Estudos Subterrâneos da Universidade Federal de São Carlos (LES-UFSCar), Brazil.

**Specimen preparations**

Images of ethanol preserved specimens of *Spaeleoleptes gimlii* sp. nov. were captured on a Leica DFC295 camera coupled to a Leica M205C stereo microscope with a Planapo 1.0× lens and produced by mounting multiple images using the LAS software (Leica Application Suite) ver 3.7 (at UFSCar). Pictures of the holotype (MZUSP 28463, male) and paratype (MZUSP 28462, female) of *Spaeleoleptes spaeleus* were taken with a Leica DFC295 digital camera attached to a Leica M205A stereo microscope (at Museo Argentino de Ciencias Naturales – MACN, Buenos Aires, Argentina). Different focal planes of images were combined using Helicon Focus Pro (www.heliconsoft.com). Male genitalia preparation followed Acosta et al. 2007, with temporary mounts embedded in glycerol. Line drawings of male genitalia were made using a Leica M205C stereo microscope (at MACN) and were digitized using Illustrator 23.1. Figures were edited using Photoshop CS5. For SEM, dissected body parts were dried and mounted on adhesive copper tape (EMS 77802; Electron Microscopy Sciences) affixed to an aluminum stub. Uncoated SEM preparations were examined using an FEI Quanta 250 (at the UFSCar).

**Maps**

The map was produced with the software QuantumGis Desktop 3.6.0 (QGis Open Source Geospatial Foundation). The coordinates were obtained from field trips to the study location with a global positioning system (GPSGarmin 60CSx).

**Results**

**Taxonomy**

Class Arachnida Lamark, 1801  
Order Opiliones Sundeall, 1833  
Suborder Laniatores Thorell, 1876  
Family Escadabiidae Kury & Pérez-González in Kury, 2003

**Genus Spaeleoleptes** H. Soares, 1966  
Figs 3–6


**Etymology**

The derivation of the generic name is incorrect; it should be spelled ‘Spelaeoleptes’ (Kury 2003) from the Greek σπήλαιον (spelaion = cave, cavern) and part of the pre-existing genus *Gony leptes*. Although incorrect, the original name, *Spaeleol eptes*, has to be kept according to article 32.5.1 of the currently valid ICZN (1999), because it is considered as an incorrect latinization of the Greek em`ljanov. Gender masculine.

**Placement**

*Spaeleoleptes* was originally described in Phalangodidae: Minhuiidae (= Kimuliidae). The genus was considered family uncertain by Kury (2003) and transferred to Escadabiidae by Kury & Pérez-González (2007).

**Species included**

*Spaeleoleptes spaeleus* H. Soares, 1966 and *Spaeleoleptes gimlii* sp. nov.

**Emended diagnosis**

*Spaeleoleptes* clearly differs from the other genera of Escadabiidae by the unique combination of the following characters: legs I and II sexually dimorphic, males with tibia I thickened, with a glandular/sensorial? region with “droplet-like” pegs (sensu Willemart et al. 2010) present mainly on the retrolateral surface (Figs 5, 10); glandular/sensorial? region with “droplet-like” pegs ventrally on patella and tibia II in males (Figs 5, 11); post-ocularium region armed with two pointed tubercles, which may be reduced to two granules (Figs 3D, 7B); body hourglass-shaped, covered by setiferous tubercles; coxa and femur IV not thickened; ocularium globose, without apical projection; ocularium and chelicerae not sexually dimorphic. The genital morphology differs from that of other genera of Escadabiidae by the presence of very robust, thickened and folded conductors, totally or partially covering the capsula interna; an capsula interna with two lateral projections; two pairs of reduced ventral setae on the pars distalis and apical lamina very broad (Figs 6, 14).

**Distribution**

The genus is restricted to two caves in Eastern Brazil. *Spaeleoleptes spaeleus* from Lapa Nova do Maquiné, Cordisburgo municipality, State of Minas Gerais (cave belonging to the Bambuí geomorphological group), and *S. gimlii* sp. nov. from Gruta Natal cave, Itaetê municipality, State of Bahia (cave belonging to the Una geomorphological group) (Fig 2).
Material examined

Holotype

BRAZIL • ♂; Minas Gerais, Cordisburgo, Lapa Nova de Maquiné cave; 19°07′31ʺ S, 44°21′07ʺ W; MZUSP 28463 (ex: MZUSP-OS 3187).

Paratype

BRAZIL • ♀; same collection data as for holotype; MZUSP 28462 (ex: MZUSP-OS 3187).

Notes about the type material

Soares (1966) deposited the type material of *Spaeleoleptes spaeleus* in the “Otto Schubart Collection” with the number 3187. In addition to a holotype male, one female paratype and other male paratypes were deposited with the same number (3187) in this same collection. A third male and two female paratypes were deposited in the collection “Coleção H. Soares” with the number 54 and this material was destroyed in the fire at the National Museum of Rio de Janeiro (MNRJ) in 2018, where the “Coleção H. Soares” was deposited. In 2003, Kury referred to the material type with the collection numbers MZUSP-OS 3187. Today, the male holotype and female paratype from the “Otto Schubart Collection” (3187) are...
incorporated into the collection of the University of São Paulo Museum of Zoology (MZUSP) with the collection number: MZUSP 28463 (male holotype) and MZUSP 28462 (one female paratype). These two specimens were analyzed in this work.

Etymology

The original species name is incorrect; it should be spelled 'spelaeus' from Greek σπήλαιον (spelaion = cave, cavern). Although incorrect, the original name, spaeleus, can’t be emended according to article 32.5.1 of the currently valid ICZN (1999), because it is considered as an incorrect latinization of the Greek σπήλαιον.

Diagnosis

Spaeleoleptes spaeleus differs from S. gimli sp. nov. mainly by the following combination of genital characters: apical lamina with a pointed medial projection; the presence of three lateral pairs of reduced setae ventrally on the apical lamina; lateral projections of the capsula interna distally pointed; and by the ventral keel of the pars distalis with a round top in ventral view (Fig. 6). Both species of Spaeleoleptes have a very similar external morphology, but S. spaeleus can be distinguished by having the tibia I modified, horse saddle-shaped, in retrolateral view (Figs 5A–B); the two large pointed tubercles in the post ocularium region; and by the body being covered by large setiferous tubercles (Fig. 3).

Redescription

Male (holotype, MZUSP 28463) (Figs 3–6)

Measurements (in millimeters). Total body length = 2.2; carapace length = 0.78; scutum magnum length = 1.9; carapace maximum width = 1.0; mesotergal scute maximum width = 1.50.

Body. Entirely covered by setiferous tubercles with the exception of the carapace, chelicerae, and pedipalp (Fig. 3).

Dorsum. Scutum magnum hourglass-shaped with the carapace slightly narrower than the mesotergal shield. Left and right anterior margin of the carapace is armed with two large pointed tubercles close to each other. Mesotergal shield trapezoidal, with areas increasing in width in an anteroposterior direction, with area I being the smallest and area IV the largest (along transversal axis). Areas IV and V with the same width (Fig. 3). Anterior margin of carapace straight, with no pronounced cheliceral sockets. Posterior margin of scutum straight. Each antero-lateral margin of the carapace is armed with two large, pointed tubercles close to each other. Massive ocularium and frontal hump well marked near the anterior margin of the carapace. Ocularium rounded, with several small granules on the surface. Two eyes on the lateral surface of the ocularium with reduced cornea, no visible retina. Carapace in lateral view with a posterior ocularium region slightly convex, armed with two rounded-tipped tubercles. Deep sulcus I. Mesotergal scutum with five distinguishable areas of approximately the same size (along anteroposterior axis). Sulci II–IV shallow (not well marked), especially the sulci III and IV. Sulci II–IV complete, extending from center to edge of mesostegum. Areas I–V and free tergites each with a transversal row of pointed setiferous tubercles. Coxa IV visible in dorsal view, armed with several prominent setiferous tubercles on the retrolateral-dorsal surface.

Venter. Free sternites each with a transverse row of pointed setiferous tubercles. Anal operculum covered by many low, robust setiferous tubercles of the same size as those of the free tergites. Coxa IV longer than wide, with low setiferous tubercles on the ventral surface. Spiracles free, not concealed by coxa IV.

Chelicera. Basichelicerite unarmed, with a well-marked rounded bulla. Cheliceral hand unarmed, normal, neither swollen nor hypertelic, covered with some sensilla.

region horse saddle-shaped in retrolateral view. This modified glandular/sensorial? region has several "droplet-like" pegs present mainly on the retrolateral surface, but they may also be present dorsally and extend from the subproximal region to the subdistal region of the tibia I, occupying the entire medial area (Fig. 5B). Tibia I also expanded retrolaterally in its medial region, in dorsal view (Fig. 5A). Males also have legs II with a glandular/sensorial? region with "droplet-like" pegs on the ventral surface, medially on the patella II and proximally on the tibia II (Fig. 5D). Patella and tibia II slightly expanded ventrally in the glandular/sensorial? region, in lateral view (Fig. 5C). Tarsal formula: 4(2):?:5:5.


**Table 1** (continued on next page). Body and leg measurements (in mm) of analyzed specimens of *Spaeleolopes spaeleus* H. Soares, 1966 and *Spaeleolopes gimli* sp. nov. Abbreviations: tr = trochanter; fe = femur; pa = patella; ti = tibia; me = metatarsus; ta = tarsus.

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<th><em>Spaeleolopes spaeleus</em> female paratype (MZUSP 28462)</th>
<th><em>Spaeleolopes gimli</em> sp. nov. holotype (LES 00341)</th>
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European Journal of Taxonomy 9: 1–63 (2024)
Spaeleoleptes spaeleus male holotype (MZUSP 28463)
Spaeleoleptes spaeleus female paratype (MZUSP 28462)
Spaeleoleptes gimli sp. nov. male holotype (LES 00341)
Spaeleoleptes gimli sp. nov. female paratype (LES 027941)
Spaeleoleptes gimli sp. nov. male paratype (LES 027941)

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</table>

Table 1 (continued). Body and leg measurements (in mm) of analyzed specimens of Spaeleoleptes spaeleus H. Soares, 1966 and Spaeleoleptes gimli sp. nov. Abbreviations: tr = trochanter; fe = femur; pa = patella; ti = tibia; me = metatarsus; ta = tarsus.

Male genitalia (Fig. 6). Pars distalis swollen, separated from the pars basalis by a constriction. The apical region of pars basalis extends over the pars distalis dorsally, forming a structure similar to a small round-tipped plate in the region of constriction that separates pars basalis and pars distalis. Pars distalis with a ventral keel with round top in ventral view. Pars distalis with an apical lamina partially surrounding the glans ventrolaterally. Apical lamina with three lateral pairs of reduced setae ventrally. Apical lamina with a pointed medial projection. Four ventral setae reduced on the pars distalis. Glans with a pair of very robust, thickened, and folded conductors, partially covering the capsule interna. Capsula interna with lateral projections pointed.

Female (paratype, MZUSP 28462) (Fig. 4)
Measurements (in millimeters). Total body length = 2.3; carapace length = 0.8; scutum magnum length = 2.0; carapace maximum width = 1.0; mesotergal scute maximum width = 1.60. Leg measurements in Table 1.

Body. Similar in appearance to the males but without the modified region on the tibia I, II and patella II. Ocularium with no small granules on the surface. Left antero-lateral margin of the carapace is armed with two large pointed tubercles close to each other, and the right antero-lateral margin of the carapace is armed with three large pointed tubercules close to each other (Fig. 4E). Tarsal formula: 4(2):5(3):5:5.

Distribution
Known only from the type locality.


Material examined
Holotype
BRAZIL • ♂; Bahia, Itaetê, Gruta Natal cave; 12°59′48ʺ S, 41°05′27ʺ W; 4 Jul. 2004; M.E. Bichuette leg.; LES 00341.

Paratype
BRAZIL • 1 ♂, 1 ♀; same collection data as for holotype; LES 027941 • 1 ♂; same collection data as for holotype; LES 027942 (SEM voucher).

Etymology
The species epithet is used as a noun in apposition. It refers to the dwarf Gimli, one of the main characters from J.R.R. Tolkien’s famous novel “The Lord of the Rings”. This name was chosen because in Tolkien’s novel the dwarves are a race associated with mining and have a strong admiration for caves. Particularly, Gimli explicitly expresses his fascination for the Glittering Caves of Aglarond with their extensive series of spectacular speleothems, and after the defeat of Sauron he was given the lordship over this marvelous cave. The intention of the specific name is to make a metaphorical association with the close relationship of this species with its subterranean habitat.

Diagnosis
Spaeleoleptes gimli sp. nov. differs from S. spaeleus mainly by the following combination of genital characters: apical lamina with a narrower base and medial projection absent; the presence of four lateral pairs of reduced setae ventrally on the apical lamina; by the lateral projections of the capsule interna being distally flattened; and by the ventral keel of the pars distalis having straight top in
ventral view (Fig. 14). The external morphology of *S. gimli* also presents many convergences, but it can be distinguished by the slight depression on the retrolateral surface of tibia I (Fig. 10A); the two-pointed tubercles on the post-ocularium that are reduced to two small granules; and by the absence of large setiferous tubercles covering the body (Figs 7, 14).

**Fig. 7.** *Spaeleoleptes gimli* sp. nov., male paratype (LES 027942), dorsal view. A. Habitus. B. Detail of carapace. C. Detail of antero-lateral margin of carapace. Arrows indicating the two projections. D. Detail of right coxa IV.

**Description**

**Male** (holotype LES 00341) (Figs 7–14)

**Measurements** (in millimeters). Total body length = 2.18; carapace length = 0.77; scutum magnum length = 1.84; carapace maximum width = 1.07; mesotergal scute maximum width = 1.5.

**Leg measurements** in Table 1.

**Body.** Entirely finely granulated.

**Dorsum** (Figs 7, 13). Scutum magnum hourglass-shaped with the carapace slightly narrower than the mesotergal shield. Mesotergal shield trapezoidal, with areas increasing in width in an anteroposterior direction, with area I being the smallest and area IV the largest (along transversal axis). Areas IV and V with the same width. Anterior margin of carapace straight, with no pronounced cheliceral sockets. Posterior margin of scutum straight. Each antero-lateral margin of the carapace is armed with two small, round-tipped tubercles close to each other. Massive ocularium. Ocularium rounded, with several small granules on the surface. Two reduced eyes on the lateral surface of the ocularium, with cornea and retina. Carapace in lateral view with the posterior ocularium region slightly convex, armed with two thickened granules. Deep sulci I. Mesotergal scutum with five distinguishable areas of approximately the same size (along anteroposterior axis). Sulci II–IV shallow (not well marked), especially the sulci III and IV. Sulci II–IV complete, extending from center to edge of mesotergum. Areas I–IV with several setiferous tubercles. Area V and free tergites each with a transversal row of setiferous tubercles. Coxa IV visible in dorsal view, armed with several small setiferous tubercles on the retrolateral-dorsal surface.

**Venter** (Fig. 7). Free sternites each with a transverse row of small and rounded setiferous tubercles. Anal operculum covered by many low, robust setiferous tubercles of the same size as those of the free tergites. Coxa IV slightly rounded, longer than wide, with no setiferous tubercles on the ventral surface. Coxa IV with a cylinder-shaped projection on the ventro-distal portion, next to sternites. Spiracles somewhat concealed by coxa IV. Epistome with sulcus well marked. Post-sulcal epistome wider than tall, with a medial groove dividing the post-sulcal epistome into two convex domes. Basal pre-sulcal epistome wide and long, almost triangular. Pre-sulcal epistome process long and somewhat cylindrical, without median constriction (Fig. 8D).

**Chelicera** (Figs 9A–C). Basichelicerite unarmed, with a well-marked rounded bulla. Cheliceral hand unarmed, normal, neither swollen nor hypertelic, covered with several sensilla on the anterior surface.

**Pedipalp** (Figs 9D–H). Raptorial morphotype (sensu Wolff et al. 2016). Coxa short, unarmed, finely granulated and with a row of three small granules on the mesal surface. Trochanter globular, with one small setiferous tubercle dorsally and two pronounced setiferous tubercles disto-ventrally, with two other pronounced granules baso-ventrally. Femur armed ventrally with two proximal and two smaller medial major spines (i.e., stiff pointed bristles in highly elevated sockets, sensu Wolff et al. 2016); dorsally with a row of small granules and two subdistal-mesal major spines. Patella cylindrical, armed with one ventro-medial major spine on the mesal surface. Tibia armed ventrally with four ectal and four mesal major spines. Tibia armed ventrally with four ectal and four mesal major spines. Tarsus armed ventrally with three ectal and three mesal major spines. All major spines possess very small and sparse microtrichia covering the distal half. Claw present.

**Legs** (Figs 10–12). Cuticle of legs is scale-like and granulated except on calcaneus and tarsus. Calcaneus restricted to the distal portion of legs. Legs I and II sexually dimorphic, males with thickened tibia I. The glandular/sensorial? region is present on the retrolateral surface and extends from the subproximal region to the subdistal region of tibia I, occupying the entire medial area (Fig. 10). Males also have glandular/sensorial? openings with “droplet-like” pegs on the patella and tibia II ventrally, but different from what is observed in *S. spaeleu*. In *S. gimli* sp. nov. the glandular/sensorial? openings are not
concentrated in one region but are dispersed throughout the ventral region of the patella and tibia II (Fig. 11). Patella and tibia II are not expanded ventrally. Tarsal formula: 4(2):6(3):5:5.

Fig. 8. *Spaeleoleptes gimli* sp. nov., male paratype (LES 027942). A. Habitus, lateral view. B. Lateral carapace showing the ozopore region. C. Habitus, ventral view. D. Epistome, anterolateral view. E. Detail of spiracle area.

Male genitalia (Fig. 14). Pars distalis swollen, separated from the pars basalis by a slight constriction. Pars distalis with a ventral keel with straight top in ventral view. Pars distalis with a broad apical lamina with narrow base that does not surround the glans ventrolaterally. Apical lamina with two very small setae located in a depression in the mid-apical region. Apical lamina with four lateral pairs of

Fig. 9. *Spaeleoleptes gimli* sp. nov., male paratype (LES 027942). A. Right chelicera, ectal view. B. Right chelicera, mesal view. C. Right chelicera, frontal view. D. Right pedipalp, ectal view. E. Right pedipalp, mesal view. F. Detail of the two basal major spines on ventral femur of right pedipalp, ectal view. G. Detail of major spine on right pedipalp with very small and sparse microtrichia, ectal view. H. Detail of spines on mesal distal femur of right pedipalp, mesal view.
setae ventrally reduced. The other four ventral setae reduced on the pars distalis. Glans with a pair of very robust, thickened, and folded conductors, almost completely covering the capsula interna. Capsula interna with lateral projections distally flattened.

Female (paratype, LES 027941)

Measurements (in millimeters). Total body length = 2.3; carapace length = 0.8; scutum magnus length = 1.8; carapace maximum width = 1.1; mesotergal scute maximum width = 1.6. Leg measurements in Table 1.

Body. Similar in appearance to the males but without the modified region on the tibia I, II and patella II. Tarsal formula: 4(2):6(3):5:5.

Natural history

The specimens were found in the aphotic zone near the water body inside the Gruta Natal cave (phreatic water); they were under rocks in highly moist substrate. They were not grouped and did not show gregarious habit. It is noteworthy that *S. gimli* sp. nov. exhibits thanatosis as a defensive behavior.

Distribution

Known only from the type locality, Gruta Natal cave.

Discussion

Escabbiidae is one of the hardest Zalmoxoidea families to diagnose. This is in part due to the scarce morphological information available for its component species, which prevents us from having a reliable
diagnosis applicable to all the genera and species. Before this work, none of the escadabid species have ever been redescribed under modern taxonomic criteria, including external and genital characteristics. Regarding male genital characteristics, their importance in the taxonomy and systematics of harvestmen has been demonstrated for decades and there is already a consensus among harvestman taxonomists (e.g., Martens 1976; 1986; 1988; Pinto-da-Rocha 1997; Kury & Pérez 2002; Kury & Villarreal 2015, Pérez-González et al. 2016). Genital characters are of extreme importance in the delimitation of genera and species as well as in higher taxonomic categories. This is particularly important in groups where a large number of species exhibit highly conserved morphology (stasis) and also where some external features appear convergently in more than one lineage (e.g., Gainett et al. 2020). This is the case in many Zalmoxoidea and it needs to be investigated whether this is the case with Escadabidae. The detailed study of the male genitalia of the two species of *Spaeleoleptes* is the first step in this direction.

For Escadabidae, this is the first time that the genitalia of the species of *Spaeleoleptes* is described and illustrated, and only the third time that images or illustrations of the genitalia of the family’s species are published. The first species to have the male genitalia illustrated was *Recifesius pernambucanus* H. Soares (1978, figs 6–7); however, the author did not offer any description or interpretation of what was illustrated, and the morphology of the glans is difficult to interpret. We suspect that the penis was damaged during...
the preparation process, since Soares often used aggressive KOH for this purpose (A.B. Kury comm. pers.). The second escadabid with documented male genital morphology was an indeterminate species assigned to the genus Baculigerus H. Soares by Kury & Pérez-González (2007: figs 4.27f–h). The figure of this species was composed of three micrographs (one apical, one ventral, and one lateral) of the penis distalis. These micrographs were taken with a scanning electron microscope (SEM) and illustrated the external morphology in great detail. However, when using SEM, it is not possible to examine the morphological characteristics of the capsule interna that can only be observed through transparency. The present work shows for the first time a detailed study, compatible with modern standards, of Escadabiidae genitalia, including drawings made from preparations observed under the compound microscope. With this, the knowledge about male genitalia of Escadabiidae increases considerably, allowing, in addition to a good identification of the species of Spaeleoleptes and possibly related species, the identification of a series of characteristics that should be compared with species of other genera to verify their diagnostic value, as well as putative synapomorphies to be tested in a phylogenetic framework.

Kury & Pérez-González (2007) proposed two primary species groups under Escadabiidae. The first group, also known as the “Escadabius group”, which includes all species of the genus Escadabius, is primarily identified by the presence of free sternites with long falciform projections in males; penis without setae and with very small conductors; pars distalis not separated from pars basalis by a groove; and poorly developed apical lamina of the pars distalis. The second group includes all the other genera of Escadabiidae and was called by the authors the “Baculigerus group” and is characterized by having poorly armed sternites or without projections but having tibia I or II modified in a warty or saddle-shaped mound; penis with small setae; large and well-developed conductors; pars distalis separated from pars basalis by a groove; and well-developed apical lamina of the pars distalis. However, these groups were proposed based on the scarce information available (Pérez-González pers. obs.) and still need to be tested in a broader context of morphological sampling. Even so, if we consider the scheme proposed by Kury & Pérez-González, the Spaeleoleptes species are part of the “Baculigerus group” because they have all the characteristics originally proposed, although two of them are present in Spaeleoleptes species in a slightly different way from those described previously: 1) in S. gimli sp. nov. the tibia I are not modified into a wart or saddle shape as in S. spaeleus (and other “Baculigerus group members”), but rather into a slight depression on the retrolateral surface and 2) the region of the sulcus that separates the pars basalis from the pars distalis in S. spaeleus forms a kind of dorsal plate by extending the distal region of the pars basalis over the pars distalis.

In this work, we also provide the first documentation of the modified areas found on the legs I and II of Spaeleoleptes species. Soares (1966) had already observed these regions on tibia I and II (but not on the patella) of S. spaeleus, referring to them as regions of swelling, more pronounced in tibia I than in II. Here we recorded the arrangement of these regions in S. spaeleus using high-quality digital photos, and we captured the format and arrangement of these openings in S. gimli sp. nov. using SEM images of the tibiae I and II in an even greater detail. Willemart et al. (2010) published a pioneering study on the format and distribution of glandular openings on the legs of harvestmen of the suborder Laniatores and mentioned in that work three Zalmoxoidea species with pores that resembled those seen in Spaeleoleptes species. Two of the species studied by the authors belong to the escadabid genus Brotasus (species not identified), and for these species, the authors recorded the presence of swelling with pores on tibiae I, II, and on the patella III. According to Willemart et al. (2010), these openings could be glandular or have a sensory function, as they differ from common glandular openings by the presence of “droplet-like” pegs. In the only specimen of S. gimli used for SEM images, we did not find any type of glandular secretion near the modified regions of the tibiae and patellae I and II. However, it is possible to see, through transparency, a dense and whitish internal area associated with the pore region in S. spaeleus, which may lead us to believe that it could be a glandular region (Fig. 5). Even though the objective of this work is not to propose functions for this type of modification, we believe that the images registered here can provide data that have great potential to be

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**Fig. 14.** Line drawings of male genitalia of *Spaeleoleptes gimli* sp. nov. male holotype (LES 00341). A. Full genitalia, dorsal view. B. Detail of pars distalis, dorsal view. C. Detail of capsula interna, dorsal view. D. Detail of pars distalis, lateral view. E. Same, ventral view. Blue lines: conductors. Scale bars: 1 mm.

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used in future works on functional morphology and also help in understanding the behavioral ecology of these animals, aspects that until now have been remarkably little explored for harvestmen.

Despite extensive collections in the epigean environment of the Itaetê region, *S. gimli* sp. nov. was not recorded outside the Gruta Natale cave. This, allied to the troglomorphic characteristics (cuticle degeneration and eye reduction), categorize the species as troglobitic (obligatory cave-dwelling organisms, sensu Schiner-Racovitza, 1907). With the description of *S. gimli* for the state of Bahia in northeastern Brazil, the distribution of the genus increases in amplitude, occurring in the Cerrado (Bambuí Group cave) and in Caatinga interspersed by Atlantic Forest (Una Group cave) Brazilian biomes. The gap between the location of the two species is occupied by several subterranean environments and new species of cave harvestmen are increasingly described for these regions (Pérez-González & Kury 2002; Kury 2008; Kury & Pérez-González 2008; Hara & Pinto-da-Rocha 2008; Pinto-da-Rocha et al 2015; Pérez et al 2017). In particular, caves from the Una Group (specifically in the Una–Utinga metasedimentary basins) and surroundings present high troglobitic diversity and they are considered spots of subterranean biodiversity and also examples of unique evolutionary history (Bichuette et al 2015; Gallão & Bichuette 2015; Trajano et al 2016; Gallão & Bichuette 2018). For example, geological and hydrological barriers explain the differences among the aquatic subterranean populations, specifically the cave catfish *Rhamdiopsis krugi* Bockmann & Castro, 2010, suggesting a possible parapatric model (see: Bichuette et al 2015). The high degree of morphological specialization of *Rhamdiopsis krugi* and also of *Spaeleoleptes gimli*, characterized by an elevated number of morphological autapomorphies, could be associated with a long period of evolution in the subterranean habitat, but in the case of *Spaeleoleptes gimli* this fact should be tested in a further molecular chrono-phylogenetic approach. These factors together suggest that there are still many species of *Spaeleoleptes* to be described for the Brazilian savannah and semi-arid regions.

**Conservation Remarks**

*Spaeleoleptes gimli* sp. nov. is a troglobitic species with a very small distributional range, known from only one cave located outside the protected area of the Chapada Diamantina National Park; its population is not protected by law. Therefore, they are subject to local environmental impacts, including habitat conversion due mainly to the uncontrolled exploitation of the subterranean waters in that region and pollution of the aquifers by pesticides and deforestation in the surroundings of Gruta Natale cave. We recommend special attention for monitoring this highly specialized and endemic population whose protection should be prioritized. Troglobites are fragile and threatened species, most of them included in regional and global IUCN Red-Lists (Gallão & Bichuette 2018), which reinforces the necessity of further studies to effectively protect *S. gimli*.

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**References**


