

Spider — MiskiiRaq

UGNERKAMI MISKII RAT AMLERITAARTUT. – IN THE SPRING THERE ARE MANY SPIDERS.



Photo: A Kodiak spider in its dew-covered web.

There are at least 350 species of spiders in Alaska, belonging to seventeen families. Spiders are not insects. They are close relatives of ticks and mites and belong to a group called arachnids. Insects have three body parts, six legs, and a pair of antennae. In contrast, arachnids have two body parts, eight legs, and no antennae.

Alaska spiders are typically small, especially when compared with varieties found in warmer climates. Many don't build webs but hide in flowers to catch insects or hunt along the ground. Common Alaska spiders include crab spiders with a long second set of legs, shy hairy wolf spiders, and cobweb spiders with an orb-like body.

In the Alutiiq language, *miskiiRaq* is the general word for spider. However, there are many other spider words, indicating that Alutiiq people recognized different types and had unique names for unique varieties. For example *sukunuuk*, the Alutiiq word for daddy longlegs, a spider-like

arachnid, literally means “one who likes damp places.”

Spiders seek warm places when the weather gets cold and may crawl into houses or be transported inside with materials like firewood. So it is quite likely that spiders were regular residents of Alutiiq sod houses, living among the rafters and grass thatching that covered these warm dwellings.