This isn't a real spider. It's a disguise!

A Spider's Disguise

A crafty spider has an unusual way to avoid being eaten.

By Elizabeth Aaron

In 2012, scientist Phil Torres and his team were exploring the Amazon rain forest in South America. During the expedition, they noticed a dry, flaky-looking spider in the center of a web. Based on the spider's appearance, Torres assumed it was dead, so he went in for

a closer look. That's when he got a big surprise. The creature in the web wasn't a spider—it was just a bunch of debris arranged to look like one.

Who—or what—would do such a thing? Torres would soon find out.

"Eventually, we discovered a real, much smaller spider living behind the fake one," said Torres. "That's when we realized that the spider had created this large decoy of itself to frighten predators that might otherwise attack it."

Trash Collector

Over time, the team of scientists learned how the spider creates the decoy. According to Torres, it crawls to the forest floor, where it gathers fragments of leaves, twigs, and grass. Then it carries the materials back to its web, where it begins to construct the decoy.

"It arranges all of the materials—as well as pieces of dead insects caught in its web—in a pattern that resembles a larger version of itself," said Torres.

To make the decoy look even more lifelike, the spider shakes the web. This causes the decoy

to move—and likely scares off attackers.

The spider shown here creates decoys of itself.

Top Artist

According to Torres, this spider is most likely a member of the *Cyclosa* genus. This is a group of spiders known to make similar, but more simple, structures in their webs. Many have been found in the Philippines.

"We've seen other members of this genus make decoys with four or seven legs," says Torres. "However, nothing looked as detailed as the decoy made by this new spider. It's really amazing!"

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