EMBIIDINA

These are the webspinners. The order name itself means lively (Embio- = lively). The order name used to be (and sometimes is still used) Embioptera. There are about 200 species worldwide, but recent estimates indicate that there may be as many as 2000 undescribed. There are only 11 described species in North America.

Webspinners are minute to small insects (about 10mm), usually somewhat elongate and soft bodied. The prognathous head is relatively large with chewing mouthparts. Compound eyes are large in the males, smaller in the females; they lack ocelli. The antennae are usually filiform, shorter than the body. All females and some of the males are apterous, some males have 2 pairs of membranous wings which are held flat over the body at rest.

The legs are short and stout with the first tarsal segment of the front leg enlarged, containing silk glands. They are called webspinners because they live in a network of silken tunnels beneath stones, bark, or debris. The production of silk from these tarsal glands is involuntary - they lay down a new thread of silk everytime they move through the tunnels.

The femora of the hind legs are enlarged; they can run equally fast forward or backward through the tunnels. The tarsi are 3-segmented and they have 2 tarsal claws. They usually have 1 or 2-segmented tarsi which may be unequal in the males.

Webspinners are uncommon insects, most of which occur in the tropics. They feed mainly on decaying plant matter. At least one species is parthenogenetic.

In Alabama, we collected in the sawdust mounds around a sawmill.

Published note in file: specimens were found in a basement apartment in Hays, Kansas. They speculate that a previous tenant (a dealer in oil well supplies) who made frequent trips to Texas, or several other tenants (pilots) who made frequent trips to tropical areas unknowingly brought them in. They were established.

There are 3 families, but you are not required to know any of them: Anisembiidae, Oligotomidae, and Teratembiidae.