Flat-bellied ground spiders in an alpine glacier foreland.

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This study analyses the microhabitat of nocturnal flat-bellied ground spiders (Gnaphosidae) in an alpine glacier retreat zone at about 2000 m above sea level. Based on previously work in the Hornkees glacier forelande (Zillertaler Alpen), the hypothesis is proposed that flat stones which form a shallow space beneath are important habitat structures to rest during the day and to build cocoons for reproduction. The sampling design included comparative sampling in 4 areas where Gnaphosidea were collected and the vegetation, gravel and stone-cover was categorized according to dimensions and ground embedment. Stone and air temperature was measured in all 4 areas at least once using the sampling design. During three sampling days 64 individuals of Gnaphodes (Gnaphosa badia and Drassodes lapidosus) could be found. It could be shown that the preferred stones are medium sized and flat, they are embedded about 0-1.5 cm in the ground and form a space under the stones where the spiders built they webs and/or cocoons. Stone temperature was not related to the occurrence of spiders under the stones.