

An Old-Fashioned Way to Catch Sparassid Spiders

by Peter Jäger

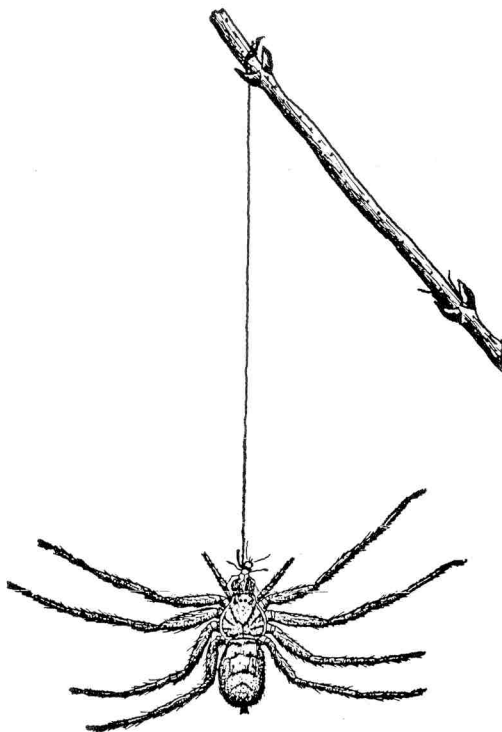
Two short notes in recent Newsletters, by Penney & Drew (76: 2–3) and Oxford & Croucher (78: 9–10) caught my attention. Both dealt with special collecting methods for particular spider species. Henschel (1991: *J. Arachnol.* 19: 150–152) has also described a new method of collecting sparassid spiders for research purposes. So I think the following could be of interest to collectors.

During an expedition to China (Shaanxi Province), I looked for specimens of the Family Sparassidae—the subject of my doctoral thesis. Two species, which I found in the leaf-litter of a mountain forest at 1,700 m, were easy to catch by hand or in pitfall traps. Another species (*Heteropoda* sp.) was much more elusive: it lived on natural rock faces or in rock crevices, as well as in man-made habitats such as the gaps in a wall made of rounded stones. At a particular time of the evening, about 8.15 p.m., the spiders would come out and sit motionless, waiting to capture prey. I could catch only juveniles by hand; the adults were too fast, especially in the evenings, when it was warm.

To outwit them, I constructed fishing tackle by tying a 20 cm line to the end of a 30 cm branch, and attached living insects (earwigs, beetles, or grasshoppers) to the end of the line to serve as bait. Then I presented the bait to an adult female, near to her front legs. When the spider bit into the 'prey', I waited for a few seconds until the chelicerae had acted as a natural fish-hook, then pulled the thread rapidly away and . . . the spider, still biting into the prey, was left hanging on the thread with legs stretched sideways in typical laterigrade position. I could then catch the spider by hand and put it into a suitable container.

This method may well prove useful for arachnologists who work in regions where new species are likely to be found. For instance, if only one sex has been collected, then the other may be trapped in a short time by using this fishing technique. Good luck!

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QUESTION BOX

Early retirement means that I can now take time to observe and record the activities of the spiders in and around my home. This year in particular, I have noticed a number of things which may be of interest to members, who may have made similar observations and who may be able to offer explanations.

Refurbishing my house has involved leaving rooms in stripped-out condition for some time, allowing a proliferation of 'window-corner spiders'—usually *Tegenarias* (mostly *gigantea* plus a few *domestica*), occasionally *Amaurobius similis* and *Theridion* spp. One day in the height of summer, I noticed that the explorations of one of the ever-present *Salticus scenicus* had left it what I assumed to be dangerously close to a *T. gigantea* web. Out rushed the occupant, only to halt within touching distance of the zebra spider, jump back, and then beat a hasty retreat to its lair. The zebra spider just sat there moving its palps before resuming its perambulations; further touchings of the web elicited no response from the owner. Bearing in mind that the *Tegenaria* had a body three times the length of the salticid's, the latter's defences must be good. The question is: what is the nature of these defences? I would be pleased to hear from anyone who can shed further light on my observations.

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Editor's Footnote: This is the first of a series of questions sent in by Mr Biffin. Please reply to me or directly to Mr Biffin.

Arachnology on the World Wide Web

by Herman Vanuytven

The huge success of the Internet is mainly thanks to the creation of the World Wide Web. The WWW Initiative is a co-operative organisation based at CERN (the European Particle Physics Laboratory in Switzerland) and its aim is to provide a system that allows users to view the same documents on different types of computer, without having to make any conversions. To this end, a computer language called HTML (HyperText Markup Language) was created. With this special coding language, it becomes possible to create WWW pages that are graphical and which contain not only text but also pictures, still and moving, and even sound. These documents can also contain 'hyperlinks' to other documents. By clicking on such a link, the page connected to that link is displayed and it allows the user to browse through the millions of pages available to the interested reader.

In June 1995, I started a WWW page called the 'Arachnology Home Page'. Its aim was to be an index to all the pages on the WWW that contain information about arachnids. At that time there was little information about this subject on the Web. Now, less than three years later, there are about 1,000 links to other pages included in the Arachnology Home Page. The Computer Centre at the University of Antwerp (UFSIA), where the Home Page is hosted, keeps a record of the number of times the pages on their computer are accessed. Recently, they provided me with the figures for September 1997: in that month alone, the Arachnology Home Page was accessed 13,956 times, that is 465 times a day on average. These data certainly indicate a hunger for this form of information.