

SPECIES IN THE FAMILY NEPHILIDAE IN SOUTH AFRICA.

Only three species can be called “golden orb web spiders”, *Nephilengys* and *Clitaetra* produce white silk so a better name is *Nephila* as it is shorter! In all cases males are very much smaller than the females and have duller colouring. Distribution is not absolute. Colouring and patterns can vary between populations and even individuals and colouring, colour patterns and even the shape of juvenile and subadult spiders differ considerably from those of adults.

ATTRIBUTES	<u><i>Nephila senegalensis annulata.</i></u> Banded legged Nephila	<u><i>Nephila fenestrata.</i></u> Black legged Nephila.	<u><i>Nephila inaurata madagascariensis.</i></u> Red legged Nephila.	<u><i>Nephilengys cruentata.</i></u> Hermit spider.	<u><i>Clitaetra irenae.</i></u> Tree orb-web spider.
Known distribution in South Africa.	Throughout all provinces.	Throughout all provinces.	Restricted to warm Lowveld regions of KZN, Limpopo & Mpumalanga.	Restricted to warm Lowveld regions of KZN, Limpopo & Mpumalanga.	Far north eastern, lowland parts of KZN only.
Colour of silk, shape and placement of web, retreat and garbage line.	Strong yellow silk. Very large orb web in open or amongst trees, etc. with protective trip lines and a garbage line. No retreat.	Strong, pale yellow silk. Large orb web in open or amongst trees, etc. with protective trip lines and a garbage line. No retreat.	Strong yellow silk. Very large orb web, usually amongst trees, etc. with protective trip lines and a garbage line. No retreat.	Strong white silk. Asymmetrical orb web often against a wall, large rock or tree trunk with funnel shaped retreat.	Tough white silk, small orb web, elongated vertically, almost ladder-like, asymmetrical with greater part below hub. Flat over depressions on tree trunks, walls etc. Vertical, central garbage line of prey remains and egg sacs.
Average body length of adult female.	25 - 30 mm.	20 - 30 mm	30 - 35 mm	20 - 25 mm	7 – 9 mm
Legs. Colour and presence or absence of brushes.	Banded yellow and dark brown. Brushes of hair on legs 1, 2 & 4.	Legs dark blackish-brown. No bands. Brushes of hair on legs 1, 2 & 4.	Reddish brown, and dark brown. No brushes of hair.	Banded dark and light brown. No brushes of hair.	Legs yellowish white, brown towards tips. No brushes of hair.
Carapace.	Brown or silvery.	Dark brown.	Black or silvery.	Black.	Pale grey with white hairs towards side.
Sternum	Yellow.	Variable but often yellow with dark central mark.	Black.	Usually uniform dark yellow but sometimes orange.	Yellow with white patches.
Abdomen.	Cylindrical. Variable but usually with a distinct yellow and black pattern dorsally and yellow with black patterns ventrally. Colours and patterns of subadults and juveniles different.	Cylindrical. Variable, usually dorsally pale towards front, silvery or yellow. Darker to rear with intricate patterns, often bright blue with black scribbles. Ventrally with distinct yellow and black window shaped markings. Colours and patterns of subadults and juveniles different.	Cylindrical. Silvery-grey towards front with band of yellow/black patterns, centrally towards rear. Sides streaked black & silvery white.	Almost globular. Colouring quite variable but usually mottled black and dark grey-brown above with pale yellow bands on sides.	Dorso-ventrally flattened grey brown with white and darker markings. Twin red patches towards the sides.
Palps.	Yellow.	Black.	Black.	Black	White

<u><i>Nephila senegalensis annulata.</i></u> <u>Banded legged Nephila</u>	<u><i>Nephila fenestrata.</i></u> <u>Black legged Nephila.</u>	<u><i>Nephila inaurata madagascariensis.</i></u> <u>Red legged Nephila.</u>	<u><i>Nephilengys cruentata.</i></u> <u>Hermit spider.</u>	<u><i>Clitaetra irenae.</i></u> <u>Tree orb-web spider.</u>
				

Since this document was written a new species, *Nephila komaci*, has been described by Matjaz Kuntner and Jonathan Coddington “**Discovery of the largest Orbweaving Spider Species: The evolution of gigantism in Nephila**”. (October 2009).

It looks very like the red legged *Nephila madagascariensis* with apparently similar distribution. Females are marginally bigger and their golden webs are correspondingly enormous.