

The Spider Club News



Editor: Mostly Shirley Armstrong & Astri Leroy May 2008 - Vol.24 #1

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Who are we?

The Spider Club of Southern Africa is a non-profit-making organization. Our aim is to encourage an interest in arachnids – especially spiders and scorpions and to promote this interest and the study of these animals by all suitable means.

Membership is open to anyone – people interested in joining the club may apply to any committee member for information.

Field outings, day visits, arachnid surveys and demonstrations, workshops and exhibits are arranged from time to time. A diary of events and outings is published at the end of this newsletter.

Mission Statement

“The Spider Club provides a fun, responsible, social learning-experience, centered on spiders, their relatives and in nature in general.”

Our Contact Details

www.spiderclub.co.za

P. O. Box 1126

Randburg

2125

Committee members

<u>Ex-Chairperson:</u> Carol Smith	083 374 6116	firstaidpriority@absamail.co.za
<u>Members:</u> Jaco Le Roux	083 258 8969	jaco.leroux@rs-components.com
Allet Honiball	082 374 0909	ahoniball@gmail.com
Ex-member Shirley Armstrong	083 637 0690	armalley@lantic.net
<u>Webmaster:</u> Eugene de Kok	013 755 2638 (w)	Eugene@spiderwatch.za.org

FAREWELL.

As those of you who are members of the googlegroup must be aware we have come to another cross road in the life of The Spider Club of Southern Africa. Our Chairman and leading light, Carol and Educator/Editor, Shirley Armstrong tendered their resignations as office bearers on the Spider Club Committee in May with immediate effect. Both of them were enormously involved Spiderlings which has been a wonderful part of the club and they both have promoted the club vigorously and using arachnids and have done amazing things in educating young and old but particularly youngsters to appreciate understand and we hope LOVE nature in general, small creatures and arachnids in particular. Shirley got the newsletter ready to send but battled with time constraints and the difficulties of integrating and attaching certain files. Both Carol and Shirley are very busy people with limited resources and they found that their time was just too limited to do justice to their positions in the club. We really do understand and are immensely sad to see you go. Thank you from all of us for the huge efforts you made with so very little encouragement, in fact probably with more brickbats than thanks. Please don't leave the Spider Club entirely. If you don't feel pressured to organize it you can probably now enjoy it.

With no-one truly at the helm Allet and Astri have taken it upon themselves to arranged the Annual General Meeting which will be held at the Girl Guides' hall "Bamber", Groenkloof Nature Reserve, Fountains Valley, Pretoria. This is an easily accessible venue from both Pretoria and Johannesburg and we NEED YOU TO ATTEND. A notice and Agenda and questionnaire with directions to the venue are attached. Because time is rather short we will simply ask you to bring tjop and dop for after the meeting and we are cordially invited by David Boshoff or Tshwane Nature Conservation to enjoy the Nature Reserve in the afternoon. We can visit the cave and check the cave violin spiders (*Loxosceles speluncarum* for starters!

If you have any Arachnological ideas, events, pictures, reports, etc., that you would like to share with your fellow enthusiasts, please feel free to air/bring them.

We have had lots of reaction and all sorts of suggestions since the news of Carol and Shirley's resignation came out, so the meeting will be an opportunity to put our collective money where our mouths are - please put on your thinking caps about the way forward and if you are brave enough to commit please consider helping to run YOUR CLUB.

KwaNunu

Please remember KWANUNU which will be held at the Durban Natural Science Museum from 11th to 15th July 2008. If you can help or just want to visit please contact Marilyn Bodasing at Bodasin8@ukzn.ac.za

Kwanunu will be the fun part and public face of the very first International Entomological Congress to be held in Africa. This is going to be an enormous event with huge numbers of delegates from around the world and will be putting our southern part of the continent firmly on the entomological map. There are so many papers being read and so many delegates attending that there will be dozens of parallel sessions going on at all times.

The 9th Annual Colloquium

Between Sunday 2nd February and Friday 8th February I attended the AFRAS 9th annual colloquium that was held in the Zoutpansberg on Lajuma in the Limpopo Province near Louis Trichardt (Makado). Being a "Rock spider" myself I first had to look up the word colloquium, which means...

*“A **colloquium** is an academic activity. Typically, a colloquium consists of lectures given by members of the academic community about their work to colleagues who work in the same or an allied field. The audience is expected to ask questions and to evaluate the work presented. Colloquia provide scholars with the opportunity to face and respond to criticism in the early stages of the development of new ideas.”*



After the welcoming function Sunday evening (3rd February 2008) the Colloquium set off to a hasty pace with the next four days mainly packed with lectures presented by an array of delegates from South Africa, Brazil, China, Russia, Zimbabwe, Democratic Republic of the Congo, USA, Belgium and Switzerland. Topics varied from the revision of a number of spider genus, diversity of arboreal oonopid assemblages, a great number of spider surveys done, resilience pattern studies, heterogeneity studies, termitophagy studies, diversity studies and even a presentation on sperm dumping in a haplogyne spider. Overall a lot of focus was placed on taxonomy of spiders; however it was refreshing to hear speakers also talk about Spiders that can help South African farmers combat pests, SANSA surveys, National Botanical Gardens surveys, photographic surveys and beginners ID courses. The question was even asked whether spiders can change the world...



Overall I would rate the 9th Colloquium as a very well balanced affair, catering for both the taxonomist as well as the behaviorist. The only lack of balance was caused by the Cabernet Sauvignon on the dinner table... Talking about catering – the food was remarkable to say the

least, and the service always gracious and sociable.

Apart from all the lectures, the program also allowed ample time for spider collecting, photography and just appreciating the awesome creation. Afternoons and evenings were spend in the bush, and the

Wednesday was completely allocated for collecting spiders on one of the many awesome hiking trails.



The 9th Colloquium drew to a close Thursday evening with a dinner presented under a starry lit African sky. Awards were presented for the best presentation, the best poster as well as the best photographic contribution. The Colloquium ended with a tour down memory lane as Astri Leroy presented photos of the last nine years of colloquiums.

In retrospect: I came back a much richer person, not just in terms of arachnological knowledge, but also in terms of networking and great friendships that was formed. If you are a member of the spiderclub – this is definitely the outing of the year. Speaking for myself “ I cannot wait for the next Colloquium – and will not miss it for the world”

To the entire AFRAS team who organized this Colloquium – one huge thumbs up!!



Jurie Kasselmann Social Arachnologist Lowveld Spiderwatch Nelspruit

A wonderful trip to Andre and Ruan Lambrecht's farm in the Zeerust district

Weekend 8th to 10th February

As usual the Lambrechts came out tops. Over the years that family has supported and sometimes been the majority shareholders in The Spider Club! (Lambrechts, past present and maybe future, YOU know who I mean.) We were accommodated in real East African Safari tents with a genuine indoor kitchen, an outside braai area and a stoep on which to sit and down the odd beer or two in the evenings. Bertus made use of the kitchen of course but the rest of us slummed and used the braai instead.



Pete “enjoying”? the stoep.

For John and me it was an ecological shock to be in the far reaches of the dry and prickly Northwest Province after the lush forested gorges of the Soutpansberg. (See Jurie's article on the 9th Colloquium). Not only was the outdoors vastly different but the arachnids were too, with venomous creatures under almost every rock, violin spiders (*Loxosceles spinulosa*) and black button spiders, not sure which species but probably *Latrodectus renivulvatus*.

The local baboon spiders were the horned variety, this time *Ceratogyrus bechuanicus*, well we think so. You see there was a fat female in a burrow and someone caught an adult male. It was decided that nuptials were in order and all the baboon spider enthusiasts trooped off on Saturday night to introduce the two spiders, but the best laid plans it all came to naught. The female was not in the mood for slap and tickle but she WAS hungry and I am afraid the male got eaten. So we never did discover if they were both the same species or not!

Some other gorgeous creatures were the koringkrieks, lots of them and a pair of huge predatory katydids. The female was laying eggs in the hardest part of the dirt track, so imagine how strong her ovipositor is! Amongst the blondes, Tess the boerbul bitch was pretty gorgeous too



A predatory katydid.

Ruan - a huge "THANK YOU" from us all for being your usual hospitable self, for driving us around and showing us the farm. Please thank your Dad too for the opportunity to visit the farm and use the facilities. It was great!
(Astri Leroy)

Arachnids for Prosperity! (I think this should be "Posterity" – A.)

Amber holds arachnid's secrets *PHOTOS* By Rebecca Morelle Science reporter, BBC News

About 40 million years ago, when the Earth looked dramatically different to how it does today, a tiny arachnid was crawling around in the Baltic. But the little bug was soon to meet a sticky demise. As it crept up a tree trunk, it encountered a blob of tree resin and its spindly legs rapidly became stuck-fast in the gluey trap. Fast-forward a few thousand Millennia and the creature still sits in the same pose, preserved in a small lump of amber. However, its location is now rather different from the prehistoric forest floor where it once roamed. It can now found within the vaults of London's Natural History Museum - taking pride of place as the latest donation in the museum's palaeontology collection.

"You can just spend hours and hours looking at amber," said Terry Collingwood, who discovered the amber-encased creature. The Rochester-based fossil collector had bought a batch of amber on an online auction site before noticing, on closer inspection, that one of the pieces looked a little unusual. "I spent a long time looking at this piece and then I noticed something was in there hiding beneath a layer - it looked like a leg. "So I started to work on the piece, polishing it and working to get those layers off. "And then I eventually saw it - I realised straightaway that it was something special."

Stuck fast

He sent the mysterious creature off to the Natural History Museum to be checked out. "When we looked at the amber under the microscope we could see it was a harvestman," said Dr Andrew Ross, collection manager of fossil invertebrates and plants. Harvestmen belong to the arachnid class. At first glance, with their eight legs, they look similar to spiders. But, while spiders' heads and abdomens are segmented, harvestmen's bodies and heads are fused together. They also lack silk glands - making spinning webs impossible. Closer examination revealed that the specimen was rare, a species called *Dicranopalpus ramiger*, which is now extinct.

"This one is quite a young spider", explained Dr Ross. "Its body is the size of a pinhead and its legs are about 6mm long. "But what is really interesting is that all of its legs are still intact - usually some of the legs will snap off as the insects try to escape the sticky resin, but this one must have got stuck fast." Dr Ross said that fossil finds like this recent donation from Mr. Collingwood were extremely important. He said: "They are a record of something that lived millions and millions of years ago. "Amber is particularly special. It preserves some of the smaller animals that you don't get preserved in rock. "It gives us a fantastic insight into lots of prehistoric insects."

Mr. Collingwood added: "I just love insects in amber. Knowing something is going to be at the Natural History Museum is just wonderful."

FROM THE BBC Science website:-

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/7327038.stm>



Spiders in Mpumalanga

I returned to Skurwekoppies in March to run the arachnid activity on a weekend camp. The farm looked beautiful as usual and we were treated to some late season rains, which luckily, only interfered with one group's arachnid hunting session. As usual, the enthusiasm of the children was most refreshing. Each group had a session in the hall discussing body parts, pedipalps and those dreaded hairy legs!

Elize (in the green t-shirt) plucked up the courage to handle a Hadogenes, much to the delight of the children who felt that 'Spinnekoptannie' had at least one convert!

Once the children had been briefed on where to look and how to catch the little critters without harming them, off we set for the hills...

The Solifugids were conspicuous in their absence, which was a pity considering how much pleasure and 'grils' they had afforded the December group.

Once again I was presented with a magnificent male rain spider on the last day – rescued from a dormitory. This one came home with me and even appeared on TV with Carol and I when we were doing an outreach programme at Modderfontien Conservancy.

Combining education, fun and arachnids

(Carol)

Displays and Expos

Yebbo Gogga

You all know this event! It once again went exceptionally well. I would like to urge the new committee to please carry on doing Yebbo Gogga. I know it is a big event and takes a lot of time to prepare and set up and hours of labour. For those that do not know the event it spans over 5 days of solid talking to people from 09:00 to 15:00 and then of course the setting up and taking down. **BUT IT IS WORTH IT TO REACH PEOPLE. A VERY BIG THANKS TO ALL THOSE WHO GAVE OF THEIR TIME TO HELP.**

Thorntree Conservancy

This event went well. Thank you Roger for organizing it. Roger, Nicolene and I talked to many people and one person even called me out of the tent to go look at a spider they found under a rock! It was a small velvet spider.



Shirley doing her amazing stuff!

Delta Environmental Centre

The Spider Club was invited to put up a stand at the recent Delta Environmental Centre expo. It was a two day event. Ruan and I were there for the first day and Shirley and I the second day. It was well attended and we spoke to about 150 children. Thank you, Ruan, for your help.

Modderfontein Conservancy

This event was organized by WESSA and the Spider Club was invited. Shirley and I spent a wonderful day talking to hundreds of children from underprivileged areas about spiders and scorpions.

School talks

Between Shirley and me we have visited approximately 18 schools reaching more than 3500 children.

Weekend and Holiday Camps

Shirley has done three weekend events in Mpumalanga and Magaliesberg.

Spider parties

We have entertained and educated children at numerous parties. The interesting outcome of parties is that the parents initially stand on the periphery and gradually move closer with their questions, until most of them are still involved when the talk is 'over' and the children have gone off to play.

Spiderlings events

Bertus and a father and his two children joined us at the Walter Sisulu Botanical Gardens in March. Then wonderful thing about these events is that we end up looking at so many other things as well as spiders. Bertus was able to educate us in the area of locusts when we discovered a huge black and red one.

Unfortunately a number of events had to be cancelled due to rain and later due to poor response.

Television broadcasts

The Spider Club was represented twice on television this year.

The first was a program that I did for a special church service. Unfortunately they cut out the bits that I said about the club but they did introduce me as from the Spider Club of SA. The second was for Paws and Claws. Shirley and I spoke about spiders and scorpions and it was screened TV 1 in May.

Long weekends away

Pullen farm – Only two Spider Club members attended the event but we also had members from the Gauteng Bat Interest Group, so we made it a combined spider and bat event. This was very successful as we went spidering during the day and batting at night.

Allet organized an amazing trip over Easter to Baviaanskloof in the Eastern Cape and was joined by amongst others a mountain club member, an Eastern Cape spider collector, Linda Wiese and Allet's boyfriend who became her fiancé! I wasn't there so here's what Linda said: Oh yes, and congratulations Allet on your engagement from all of us.

Baviaanskloof Expedition

By Linda Wiese

Jackye and Stuart le Roux were our very friendly and helpful hosts on their farm, Ferndale, on the eastern border of the Baviaanskloof Wilderness Area.



Jackye and Stuart le Roux.

The beautiful farmhouse is still the old kind with spacious rooms and wide verandahs. Driving through the crumpled terrain of the narrow valley of riverine forest with a great variety of indigenous plants and trees, crossing the stream every now and then, this is as pristine and untouched as you can get. In a wider grassy opening, we saw a pair of Forest Buzzards, and the Brownhooded Kingfisher was a regular caller at the campsite amongst others. I have never seen such a variety of butterflies in one place, not too mention the variety of invertebrates as a whole. It was enough to drive any entomologist/naturalist into sensory overload.

The accommodation was 5 star - a grass roofed deck with bed width built-in

bunks, precluded the need for tents, mattresses being all that was needed for Allet, Eduard, Susan and Stephan. The deck was built on the edge of and partly over the river, so the sound of running water and surrounding view of the opposite cliff and lush growth was idyllic. The first morning we found fresh waterbuck and leopard spoor 100m from the camp.

But the weekend was about spiders and they were abundant. Friday afternoon Stuart took Allet and Eduard up the mountain to the Fynbos area to plant traps, his Rhino 4x4 being the only vehicle capable of getting there. Sweeping, beating, active searching, and setting more traps, all the while ducking webs of all sorts, produced bags of spiders and bugs galore. Golden orb webs were especially plentiful and a spectacular sight along the road in the early morning sun. Soon the big table was lined with bottles, and Allet had her hands full organising who caught what, when and where. Even Mikhail, Jackye's son, became an enthusiastic collector and found some fine specimens.



A beautiful kite spider. *Gasteracantha* sp.

Photos by Linda Wiese.

I am not very good at putting newsletters together, so if someone out there is able to do a better job, please feel free to do so. I can get lots of material to you and you can nag the rest of the membership till they are sick and tired of you, it's more a case of being good or stupid at computers. I'm pretty doff!

Astri.

EVENTS 2008/2009

This looks a little empty. Suggestions gratefully received.

10th SEPTEMBER, 2008. Spider Stand at the Sammy Marks Museum the other side of Pretoria. Ian Englebrecht will give us more details to go into the next newsletter. We already have several volunteers and some creatures to show the public.

LONEHILL FUN DAY. Date to be announced, but generally in spring sometime.

27 – 30 SEPTEMBER, 2008. YEBO GOGGA is to be earlier this year and only over 4 days, Saturday through to Tuesday. This means that setting up will have to be done before 27th as I see it. Because it will be during the government-schools' holidays, it will be run as a holiday programme. Please keep these dates in mind!

25th OCTOBER. Astri will run another Beginners' Identification Course, which is aimed at people who know nothing about spiders but would like to start somewhere. This will be at the Sandton Field and Study Centre, Sandton, Johannesburg.

2009 WEEKEND OUTING IN MIDSUMMER. Date to be finalised, but the venue will be Lapalala Wilderness School in the Waterberg. This will be self-catering and accommodation will be basic dormitory type. Lapalala Wilderness is absolutely wonderful and our hosts will be the educators at the L.W.S. I gave them a quick beginners' i.d. course in March this year and last year Ian and Stefan Foord ran a course for students for the Univeristy of Venda at the same venue. Perhaps we can get them even more more involved in arachnids and we could undertake to give them a more up-to-date arachnid list after our visit.



Photo of a table setting at the Colloquium Dinner.