

The Spider Club News



Editor: Joan Faiola

October/November 2008 - Vol.24 #3

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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, centred on spiders, their relatives and in nature in general.”

Our Contact Details

www.spiderclub.co.za

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Committee members

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	But it is still www.spiderclub.co.za	

From the Editor:

Recently I holidayed in Zululand with a friend, and one of my objectives during my stay was to visit an indigenous nursery near St. Lucia run by some enterprising Zulu men from a definitely disadvantaged background. What I found there was inspirational, and I was very humbled by the experience, but that is another story.

As I chatted with the owners, they became aware that I liked spiders, and showed me “their spiders”, which turned out to be many specimens of *Nephila inaurata* (Red-legged Nephila), quite at home in huge webs made against shade netting at the back of the nursery. I am not really sure how they got there, but a number of the specimens had reached an impressive size.

What struck me most, though, was the fact that these simple Zulus had none of the fear and superstition that indigenous people often have, and had an earnest wish to give these spiders a haven.

As you know, however, it’s not just indigenous South Africans who fear spiders – people from all corners of the globe do, and I guess that our task is to be protagonists for arachnids, and change the mindset of those people we encounter who fear spiders.

(If you would like more information on the nursery, give me a shout).

Arachnologically yours,

Joan

Spider identification course- 25th October 2008

Report by Lloyd Grobler

On the 25th October 2008 five enthusiastic “arachnophiles” joined Astri Leroy for a beginners’ spider identification course. For me it was the second time I’ve attended this course with Astri; because I had such an awesome time on the first course I waited in great anticipation for an opportunity to do it a second time around! The course has opened up a whole new world of spiders to me. After working through our course notes and booklets (supplied by Astri), and following a very comprehensive explanation about spider anatomy, behaviour, web types etc., Astri took us for some serious spider-hunting. Using glass tubes and sweep nets, Astri demonstrated to us where and how to look for spiders, helping us to find them in and under every nook and cranny. After collecting a variety of different spiders, we took them back to the lecture room to identify them under a microscope. It was quite amazing to see what we had found! Since attending the first course with Astri in June this year, I was motivated to get into contact with SANSA for assistance in starting a survey of Arachnids in the Klipriviersberg Nature Reserve.

Astri is a wonderful facilitator and she honestly has an enormous passion for spiders! I would highly recommend this course to anyone with even the slightest interest in spiders.

Too bad if you missed it this time around, but keep your eyes and ears open and come and join us the next time, You will not be disappointed!

Proven Sac Spider Bite

Spiders get blamed for all sorts of skin lesion events, and it's not often that the sac spider is "caught in the act". Well, we were recently contacted by a member of the public concerned over a bite his wife had suffered.

Fortunately, Mr Mickey Walker was able to take a photograph of the spider. Astri identified it as *Cheiracanthium furculatum*, and offered advice as to supporting therapy. We requested that the Walkers keep us posted on Mrs Walker's progress, and Mrs Jackie Walker gave us the following information:

"Thank you so much for your help in identifying the spider that bit me & for all the information you very kindly gave us. It was quite a strange situation - I was washing up & felt this pain in my little finger - so I pulled the glove off & out fell this Sac spider. I must have killed it in the glove after it bit me as it fell out already in a dead state so I was able to get a photograph of it.

Unfortunately and surprisingly there is not a lot to show for the bite. I have attached a picture of it today (the slight white swollen bit next to my knuckle). As soon as I was bitten a white blister came up & I applied stingoes to it. Not sure if this helped calm it down or not. If it does get any worse over the next few days I will take photos & report to yourselves. You are most welcome to use the information anywhere you want to."

We contacted Mrs Walker a week later, and she confirmed that the bite had not got any worse.

Our thanks to the Walkers for their cooperation in supplying the above information.

Update on Arachnological Survey at the Lowveld Botanical Garden, Nelspruit

By Lou-Nita Le Roux

John and Astri have been coming to the Lowveld Botanical Garden for many years to share their knowledge and enthusiasm for spiders with our Garden visitors. The night and day forays in search of our elusive little hunters have always been very popular. As part of the drive to raise awareness about spiders John & Astri suggested we do a spider survey in the Garden, as much for our benefit at the Garden as for their own research.

So, on the 17th May this year, our local spider enthusiasts got together with John and Astri and dug up the Garden very enthusiastically to place pit traps in order to see which of our 8-legged friends could be found in the Garden.

Initially we placed out 12 traps in different habitats ranging from dry bushveld to forest and lawn areas of which unfortunately 3 had to be closed down in the more natural marshy area due to a high amount of over-kill of small mammals in the area. One of the traps in the cycad area will also have to be moved as the ants decided to take up residence in the trap.

We have held two trap checking sessions with the help of local spider enthusiasts and an entomologist, Schalk Schoeman, to help us identify the over-kill in insects. This way we don't waste an opportunity by simply throwing away the insects that also fall into the traps.

We aim to enlarge the survey to include tree traps as well. The information gained through the survey will be used to put together a species list and ultimately a guide to spiders in the Garden, including other interpretive materials such as posters and storyboard signs.

We have tagged and bottled the spiders found in the traps and are awaiting a visit from John and Astri in November to start sorting and identifying them.

John and Astri will be here on the evening of the 21st of November to do a night foray with the public and the morning of the 22nd of November to do a day foray.

The Lowveld Botanical Garden is part of a network of 9 National Botanical Gardens belonging to the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI). Part of our mandate is conservation, as well as education. The spider survey forms part of our drive to protect all forms of biodiversity by means of study, as well as by raising awareness amongst people and educating them to the importance of every single creature, even the smaller, scarier ones.

Lou-Nita Le Roux
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Eugene de Kock placing a trap



Entomologist Schalk Schoeman (left) and Jurie Kasselmann (Spider Club member) checking a trap.



Lou-Nita Le Roux



Jurie and his son busy sorting the spiders into containers with their site name and GPS coordinates for ID. Jurie is one of the founding members of the Lowveld Spider Club.

The Kite Spiders

By Astri Leroy

Family Araneidae (orb web weavers), subfamily Gasteracanthinae, genus *Gasteracantha*. Gaster (Latin) = stomach or in this case, abdomen, and acantha (Old Greek) = thorny, so literally thorny tummies!

We have 4 species in South Africa: *Gasteracantha falcicornis*, *G. milvoides*, *G. sanguinolenta* and *G. versicolor*.



G. sanguinolenta

Kite spiders are all very beautiful with bright colours and thorny abdomens. These abdomens are wider than long, flattish on the dorsal side with varying patterns. The cephalothorax (head region) is hard, shiny and tucked under the front of the abdomen, legs are short and often reddish in colour. *G. milvoides* has an abdomen banded yellow and red and both *G. milvoides* and *G. falcicornis* have really long spikes sticking out sideways, which makes them look like kites. Probably the most commonly seen is the small *G. versicolor* which has a pale yellow abdomen with black markings and fairly short spikes. *G. sanguinolenta*, with similarly shortish spikes, is also very widespread.

Males are considerably smaller than females and do not have such vivid colouration nor such extensive spikes as the females.

Webs are tightly woven, classical orb webs, often quite high in trees and other vegetation. The webs have open hubs, and both radii and spirals are numerous and closely spaced. Radii and foundation lines are often decorated with tufts of fluffy white silk. Bridge lines can span considerable distances and the webs seem disproportionately large for the size of the spider.



Web of *Gasteracantha*

G. Versicolor



Other genera in the subfamily are: *Afracantha*, *Gastroxya*, *Hypsacantha*, *Isoxya*.

(Editor's note: In the US these spiders are sometimes called spiny spiders. Some research has postulated that the spiders use their patterns as a strategy for catching prey. Refer: Death by Color: Spiny Spiders' Bright Stripes Attract Prey. *Science Daily*. Go to <http://www.sciencedaily.com>)

SCIENTIFIC NEWS

Nocturnal Spider Navigators in the Namib Desert

In ongoing research, a European scientist has discovered that the adult male of *Leucorchestris arenicola* (Sparassidae), also known as the Dancing White Lady spider, will readily walk several hundred metres away from his burrow in search of females, and be able to return to the same burrow.

Nørgaard has researched this extraordinary navigational ability, and his findings so far indicate that the spider's navigational system is based on vision, despite the fact that this species chooses to be active on moonless nights, and operates in conditions that humans would consider complete darkness. He says that it is clear that *L. arenicola* is using external visual cues, but the basic mechanism by which this visual input is used for navigational purposes remains unknown, and that this is one of the key questions he is currently pursuing.

Reference: Nørgaard, T. (2008) **Nocturnal Spider Navigators in the Namib Desert**. Newsl. Br. arachnol. Soc. **112**. 10-12

WE HAVE "LOST" TWO BABOON SPIDERS!

By Astri Leroy

In the course of his enormous work of revising the rather muddled taxonomy of many of what we know as baboon spiders, and that other nationalities call African tarantulas, Richard Gallon has proposed that the names *Harpactirella flavipilosa* and *Ceratogyrus bechuanicus* can no longer be used:

- *Harpactirella flavipilosa* described by Lawrence in 1936 - on re-examination, the holotype (the specimen used as the basis for the species description) has turned out to be an immature male of *Pterinochilus lugardi* Pocock, 1900.
- *Ceratogyrus bechuanicus*, our most common and widespread horned baboon spider species has also ceased to exist and the species is now treated as *C. darlingi*.

Although this may upset some people - I can hear you muttering "Why can't they leave their names alone?" - both changes are well researched and entirely logical. As you probably know the convention in naming any organism is that the original name historically given to it should be used. If it is found that the same species has been renamed without good reason, it reverts to the original scientific name. What Richard Gallon found was that there is no good reason for *Ceratogyrus bechuanicus* to be considered a different species from *C. darlingi* and the latter was the first-named species.

Richard Gallon has shown that the horn (more correctly foveal protuberance) shows considerable variation in size, curvature, width, angle and shape within the species *C. darlingi*. The shape of the foveal protuberance had previously been used to distinguish between *C. darlingi* and *C. bechuanicus*.

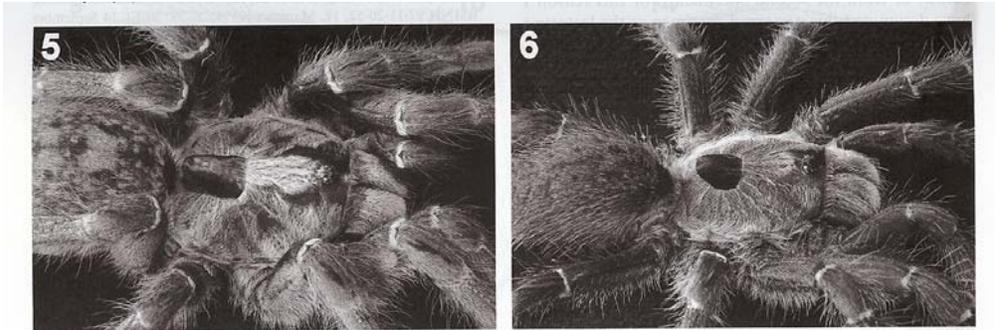
His conclusion is "*Ceratogyrus bechuanicus* is treated here as a junior synonym (that means it was described later, see above) of *C. darlingi* because their pale sub-abdominal bands are restricted to the anterior booklung covers and are between them. Their foveal protuberance morphology is also similar, with published differences being relatively trivial when viewed against the variability displayed between other specimens."

Also worth mentioning that what is often labelled as *Harpactirella flavipilosa* in RSA does not automatically become *Pterinochilus lugardi* in RSA (in fact there are several different species commonly labelled as *flavipilosa* in RSA).

So: the species *Harpactirella flavipilosa* no longer exists, nor does *Ceratogyrus bechuanicus*, in fact they never really did! I bet they don't care (and still call their friends "Boet-hairy-legs" or something anyway.)

Reference: GALLON, R. C. On some poorly known African Harpactirinae, with notes on *Avicuscodra arabica* Strand, 1908 and *Scodra pachypoda* Strand, 1908 (Araneae, Theraphosidae). *Bull. Br. arachnol. Soc.* (2008) **14** (5), 232-246.

A copy of this paper in pdf format can be e-mailed on request by either Astri or Joan, or it can be downloaded (by request and with permission) from www.britishtspiders.org.uk.



Plates 5–6: *Ceratogyrus* spp., female foveal protuberances (carapace length in mm). **5** *C. darlingi*, Mozambique (21.9); **6** *C. darlingi*, Swadini, South Africa (16.3).

OLD WIVES' TALES ARE TRUE?

It was recently reported by Reuters that research taking place in Spain on Mediterranean tarantulas (*Lycosa tarantula*) (a burrowing wolf spider, not a true "tarantula": Ed) suggests that female spiders who eat would-be suitors produce more, bigger and stronger offspring than spiders that don't.

The researchers also showed that the females waited until they had already mated with another spider before consuming the new male.

They said their study was the first "natural" experiment to prove that the old folklore about spiders was true, and postulated that this behavior might be beneficial.



The researchers set up a field experiment, because a laboratory study might have yielded artificial results.

"At natural rates of encounter with males, approximately a third of *L. tarantula* females cannibalized the male," they wrote in their report, published in the Public Library of Science journal PLoS ONE. The rate of sexual cannibalism increased with male availability, and females were more likely to kill and consume an approaching male if they had previously mated with another male.

"We show that females benefit from feeding on a male by breeding earlier, producing 30 percent more offspring per egg sac, and producing progeny of higher body condition.

Offspring of sexually cannibalistic females dispersed earlier and were larger later in the season than spiderlings of non-cannibalistic females."

The study can be found at:

<http://www.plosone.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0003484>

Reference: Rabaneda-Bueno R, Rodríguez-Gironés MÁ, Aguado-de-la-Paz S, Fernández-Montraveta C, De Mas E, et al. 2008 Sexual Cannibalism: High Incidence in a Natural Population with Benefits to Females. PLoS ONE 3(10): e3484 doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0003484

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(anyone care to comment whether the findings could apply to our South African *Lycosa spp.*? :Ed)

SPIDER CLUB DIARY 2008/2009

STOP PRESS!!!!!!! VENUE CHANGED! 8th NOVEMBER, 2008

SEDAVAN near Heidelberg: 10 .am. – + - 4:00 p.m. Leader Steve Langton e-mail

stevelangton@polka.co.za, cell: 082-896-9741, landline (011) 818-1402. The Marievale Bird Sanctuary is undergoing renovations and their toilets will be out of action for a month or two. I have therefore arranged for the SCSA to visit SEDAVAN. The details are:

Venue: Sedavan, a farm with primary & secondary schools, and a retirement village, run by the Seventh Day Adventists about 5 km outside Heidelberg, on the Vereeniging road.

Bring: Picnic lunch. Portable braais acceptable. Collecting kit and reference books.

Facilities: Near pristine areas of grassland and rocky hillside. Sheds are available in case of rain. A toilet has been made available at the school. I'm planning for a portable toilet where the activity will take place. An alternative area is available.

Constraints: Quiet is required in the vicinity of the school as church services will be in progress.

Collecting: Don't collect baboon spiders without a permit. Only take needed specimens. Leave it as we found it.

Warning: There are beehives in the vicinity (not where we hunt spiders). If you are allergic to bee sting, take note of warning signs.

Getting there:

FROM JOHANNESBURG:

Get onto the N3 Jhb - Durban highway. Pass the R23 / Heidelberg (North) / Benoni off-ramp. Leave the N3 at the R42 / Jacobs Street / Nigel off-ramp. Turn right to Heidelberg. (CONTD BELOW)

FROM EAST RAND (BENONI, ETC).

Get onto the R23 to Heidelberg. Turn left onto the N3 highway towards Durban. Leave the N3 at the R42 / Jacobs Street / Nigel off-ramp. Turn right to Heidelberg. (CONTD BELOW)

FROM FAR EAST RAND (SPRINGS, ETC):

Get onto the R51 from Springs to Nigel and continue past Nigel on the R42 to Heidelberg. Check distance from where the R42 crosses the N3 Durban highway. (CONTD BELOW)

CONTINUING FROM WHERE R42 CROSSES N3 HIGHWAY:

Proceed 1.2 km to stop street. Army Gymnasium on right and Heidelberg High School on left. Turn right into Louw Street. Proceed 100 m. Turn left into H F Verwoerd Street. Go straight for 2 km through Heidelberg, passing town centre, with a splendid stone church on right and on past Heidelberg Hospital on left. Cross the old Durban road, which is the R23.

Immediately after the bridge over the R23 there is a stop sign. Jordan Park to the right. You are still on R42.

Proceed 4.7 km, passing Freekin Fried Chicken on the left. There will be a road sign R42 Vereeniging straight, SEDAVAN right.

Turn right onto a tar road and proceed 2 km, passing Protea Park on right and Sedavan High School on left.

You are now facing a sign "Advent Haven Frail Care / Retirement Village", with a boom on the right

Turn left and proceed about 100m. Pass church on left. School is on right - we have a key to the men's toilet.

If parking is scarce, turn up ground track with Music Centre on your left and park on grass.

FROM VEREENIGING, ETC:

Take the R42 from Vereeniging to Heidelberg.

About 5 km from Heidelberg watch out for the road sign R42 Heidelberg straight, SEDAVAN left.

If you see Freekin Fried Chicken on your right, you have gone about 1 km too far - turn back. Follow the instructions above.

LATE COMERS: We will leave the area of the church and school at about 10:15.

If you arrive later, then turn left at the sign "Advent Haven Frail Care / Retirement Village", onto a ground road (NOT through the boom).

Proceed 0.7 km past a few houses and a small dam. Stop and park with some store rooms and sheds on the right.

We will be spider hunting and picnicking on the right as you arrive.

13TH NOVEMBER, 2008: 6 pm for 6:30. Nedbank Green Affinity/Africa Geographic Reader Evenings. 13th

November, Nedbank, 90 Ordnance Road, Kingsmead, Durban. Entrance is free but booking essential, on line at

www.africageographic.com click on Reader Events or call Marlene Paul on (011) 262-9465 or e-mail

marlene@africageographic.com.

15th NOVEMBER, 2008: A field trip Krantzkloof Nature Reserve in Kloof, Kwa/Zulu Natal. There will be an entrance fee to the reserve and a donation to the Spider Club would be appreciated.

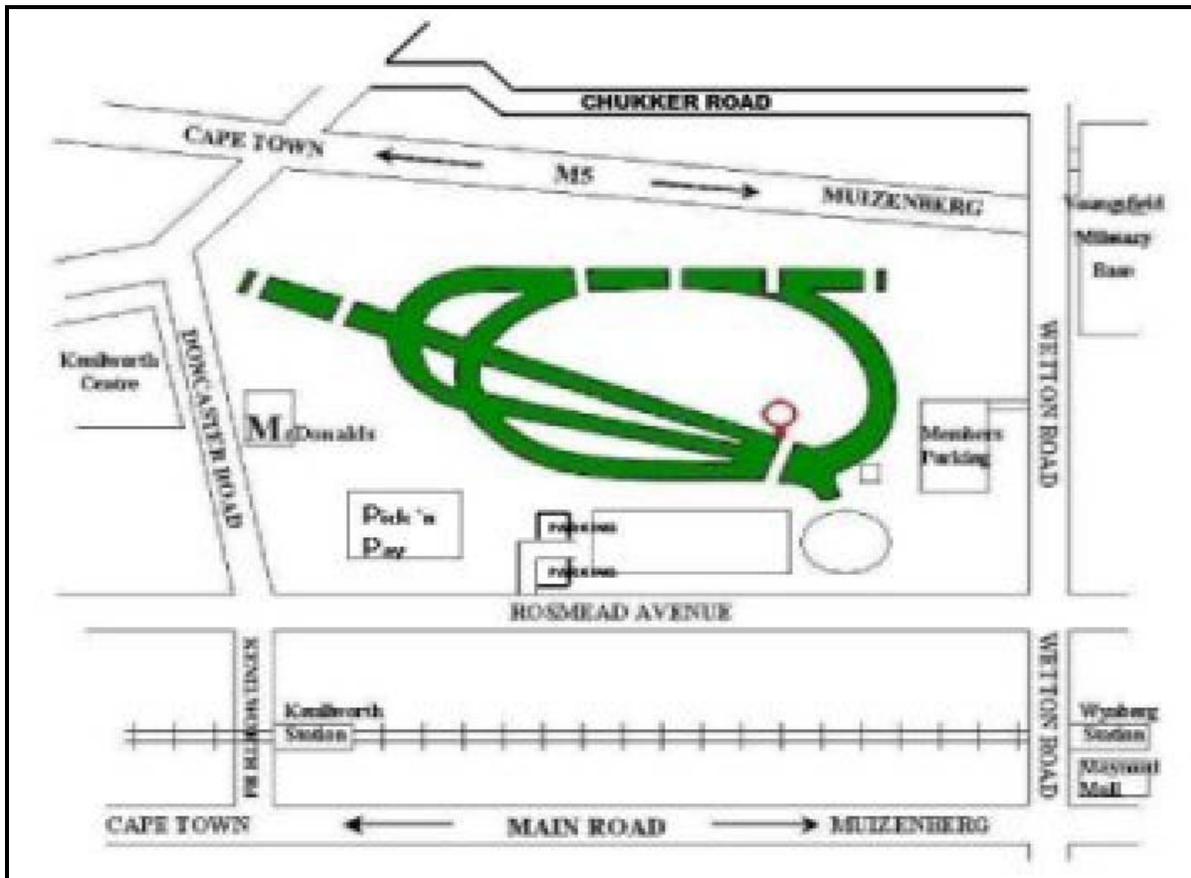
Directions: Directions to KRANTZKLOOF NATURE RESERVE FROM DURBAN Take N3 toward Pietermaritzburg and after Pavilion shopping centre on the N3 travel about 2 km, keep in left lane. The N3 branches into two here, stay left and this takes you onto the M13 (Old Highway at Paradise Valley). Go through Pinetown up Fields Hill and take Exit 23 (Village Road) off ramp. Turn right over highway and straight through the first circle, at the next circle (also a T-junction) turn right and stay in the left hand lane, follow the road up a ramp and sharp left on the top so that you are now over the railway line. At the T-junction turn left into Church Road and just after the church on your left, at the next T-junction turn left into Abelia Road and almost immediately right into Kloof Falls Road which you follow for several kilometers to the entrance to Krantzkloof Nature Reserve.

20th NOVEMBER, SANDTON, 6 pm for 6:30. Nedbank Auditorium, Ground Floor, 135 Rivonia Road, Sandton. (for Parking entrance 2). Entrance is free but booking essential. (No heckling from Spider Club members please!). Book on line at www.africageographic.com click on Reader Events or call Marlene Paul on (011) 262-9465 or e-mail marlene@africageographic.com.

22nd NOVEMBER Spider walk NELSPRUIT at the Lowveld National Botanical Garden, off White River Road (Value Mart Intersection), Nelspruit, Mpumalanga. Everyone welcome. Book with Lounita Leroux on telephone (013) 752-5531 or e-mail lerouxL@sanbi.org

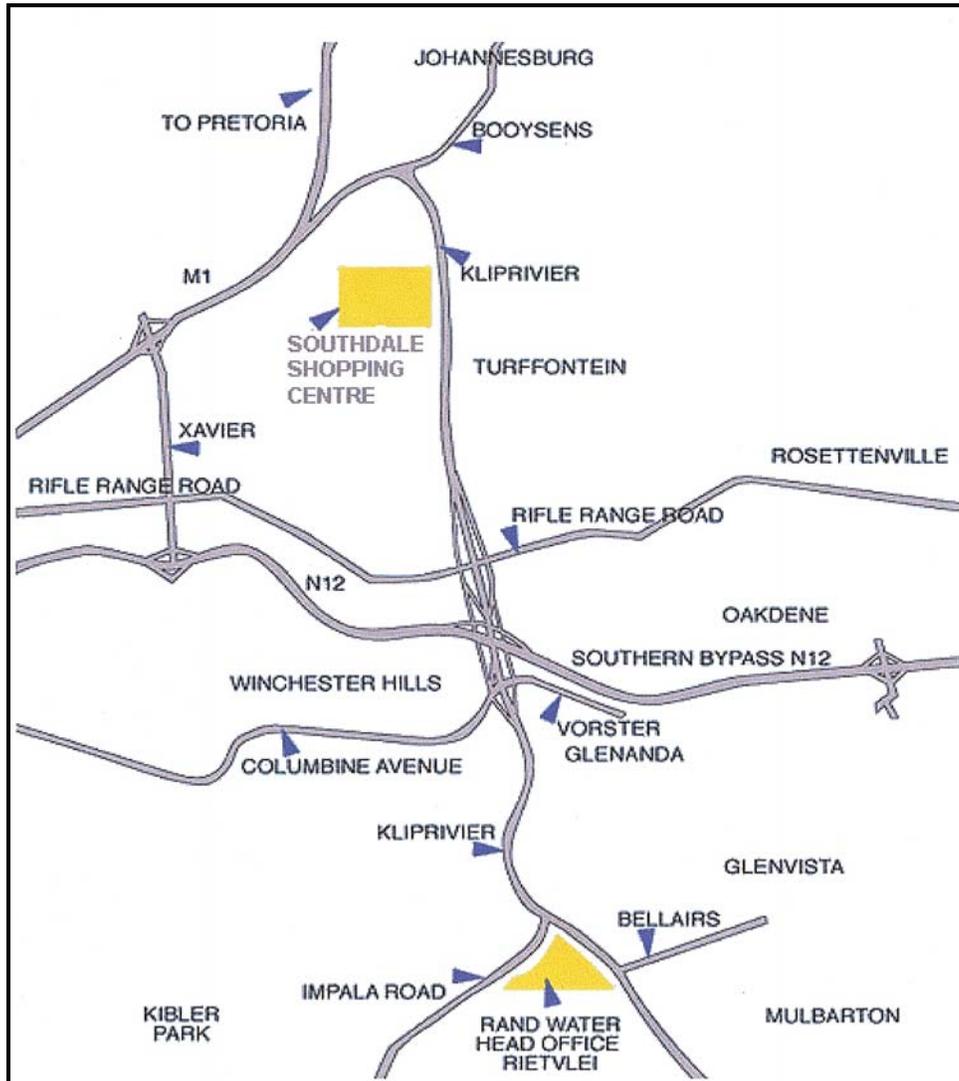
27th NOVEMBER. 6 pm for 6:30. CAPE TOWN. Nedbank BoE Clocktower Auditorium, Ground Floor, Clocktower Precinct, V & A Waterfront, Cape Town. (secure parking available). Astri will be presenting spiders to a wider audience and if you are around please come and support her. Entrance is free but booking essential, on line at www.africageographic.com click on Reader Events or call Marlene Paul on (011) 262-9465 or e-mail marlene@africageographic.com.

29th NOVEMBER, 2008. CAPE TOWN: A field trip inside Kenilworth Race Track, with Norman Larsen and Astri Leroy. 8:30 for 9 am. Contact Norman Larsen for directions on 083-698-1943 or e-mail at spiderboy@telkomsa.net or meet at the main entrance in Rosmead Avenue, Kenilworth.



2009:

24th JANUARY, 2009. 8:30 for 9. Rand Water Head Office Nature reserve in the Klipriviersberg their entrance gate is at 522 Impala Road, Glenvista. From the M1 take the Kliprivier Drive (M7) off ramp, cross Rifle Range Road and the N12 and turn right up the hill into Impala Road in (Kibler Park). From the N12 (southern Bypass) take the Kliprivier Drive offramp (M7), through one robot at Columbine/Vorster Drives, then through another robot at Van Beek Avenue and at next robot turn right into Impala Road. Rand Water's imposing entrance gate is on your left. Sign in please! Please bring a picnic lunch, something to drink and a hat. Contact Astri on info@spiders.co.za R20 per adult.



2009: 8TH FEBRUARY, 2009: 8:30 for 9. Day outing to Waaigras farm Rhenosterspruit Conservancy. 25°53.532 South 27°58.337 East, day outing in wonderful Highveld with wetlands, dams, koppies and grasslands. Details of how to get there and who to contact will be given later. R60 per adult R15 per child to be paid on the day - money to go to the Conservancy and the Spider Club.

APRIL 10 – 13 EASTER WEEKEND 2009.

Lapalala Wilderness School, in the best part of the Waterberg, Limpopo Province. R70 per person per night. Booking essential and will only be confirmed on receipt of payment, in full on or before 13th March, 2009. This will be self-catering in dormitory type accommodation. Lapalala Wilderness is absolutely wonderful and our hosts will be the educators at the L.W.S. Perhaps we can get them more involved in arachnids and we could undertake to give them a revised arachnid list after our visit.. Contact Astri on info@spiders.co.za or 073-168-7187.

Directions, take the N1 north towards Polokwane/Pietersburg and at the Kranzkop Toll Plaza take the off ramp to Modimolle/Nylstroom on the R33. Go straight through the town and proceed to Vaalwater/Mabatlane (+ - 65 ks). In Vaalwater opposite the garage at the robot turn right into Sandrift Road onto the R518 to Melkrivier. Drive approximately 45 kms till you get to the Melkrivier School, take the left fork signposted to Melkrivier School and Lapalala. Travel 12 ks on sand road to the main gate, sign in and ask for directions to the Wilderness School. Gates close 6 p.m.

It takes about 3 1/2 – 4 hours on a normal day but plan for MUCH longer over Easter Weekend!

PLEASE NOTE: It's Easter weekend when several million people take the N1 to the Zionist Church of Africa at Moria City. An alternative route to Modimolle/Nylstroom is the R511 (extension of William Nicol going north from Fourways), through Brits towards Thabazimbi, pass Beestekraal, pass the turnoff to Assen Police Station and opposite the turnoff to Koedoeskop turn right onto the R516 to Warmbaths/Bela Bela and from there the old R101 to Modimolle/Nylstroom. It's longer but may be quicker and less stressful! This may take 4 – 5 hours.