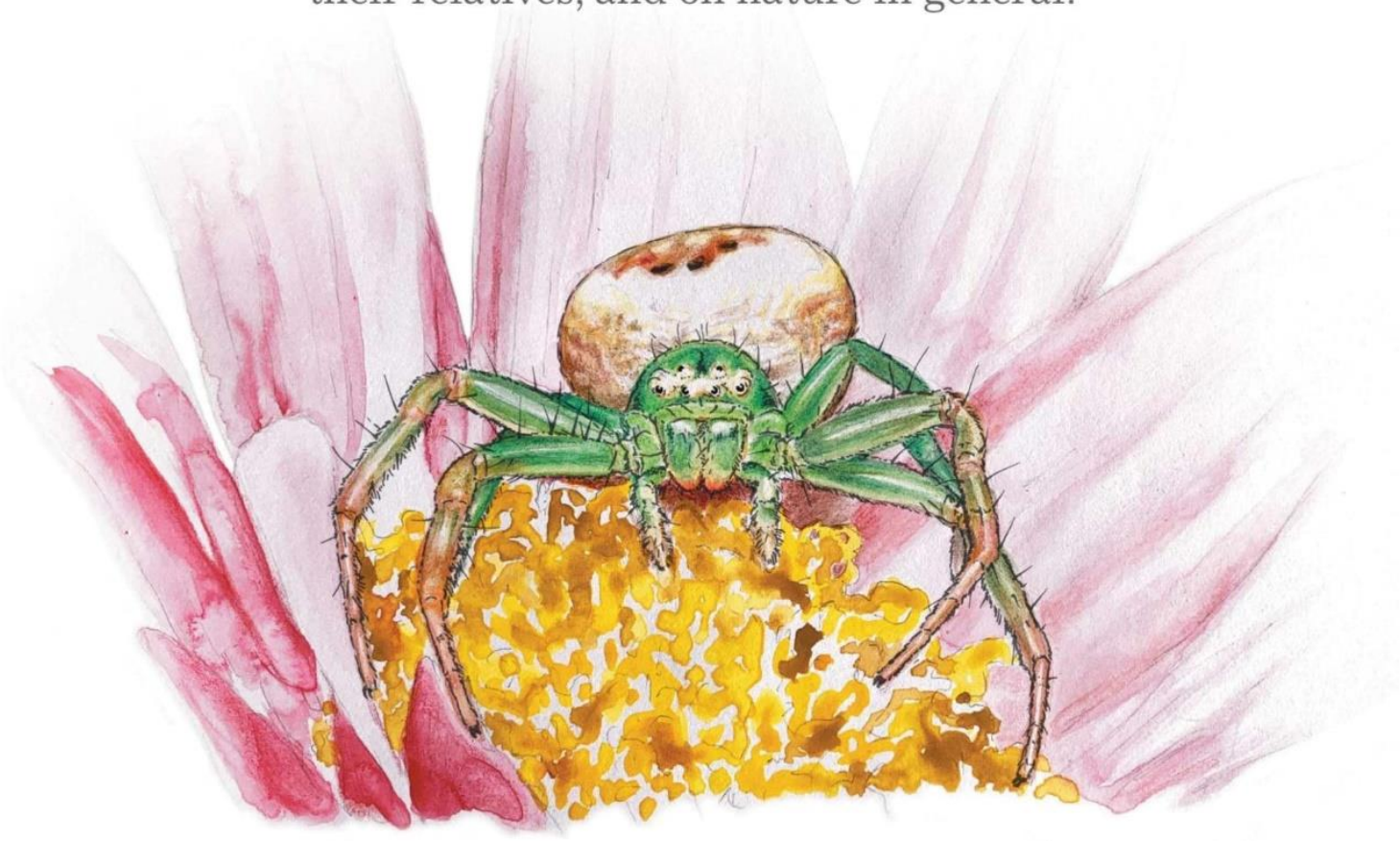
The Spider Club NEWS

September 2026 Vol. 42, No. 3

"The Spider Club provides a fun, responsible, social learning experience, centred on spiders, their relatives, and on nature in general."



SPRING EDITION

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About the Spider Club

The Spider Club of Southern Africa is a non-profit organisation. Our aim is to encourage an interest in all arachnids 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.

Contact us

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Find us on: facebook at "The Spider Club of Southern Africa"

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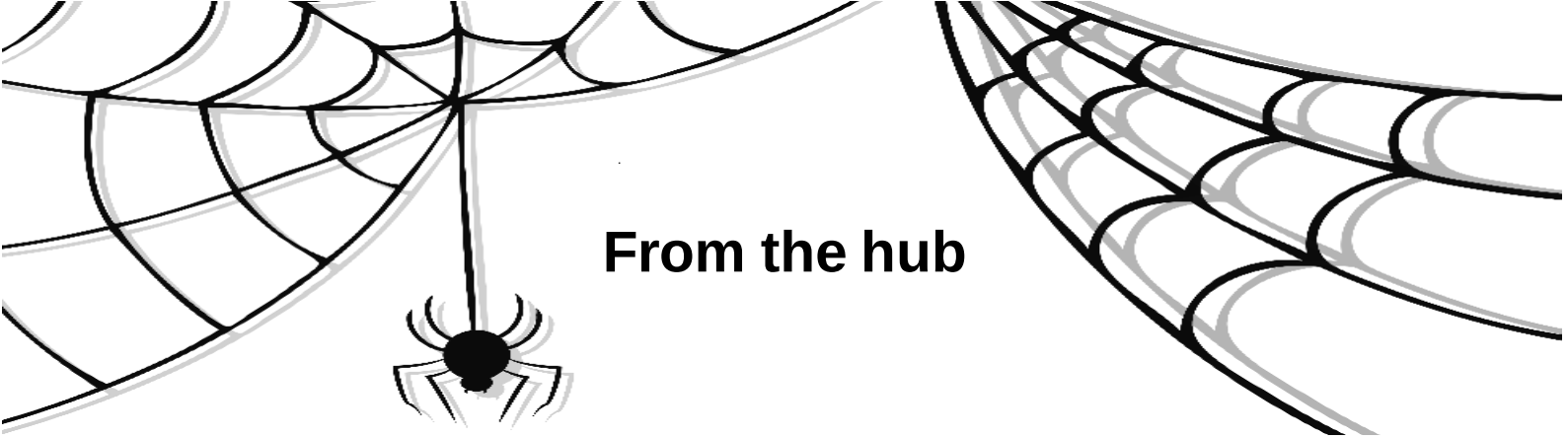
Acknowledgements:

Our sincere gratitude goes to the following people for this edition of the newsletter:

- All the photographers of the photos used in this edition. Without you, these pages would be very dull.
- Jeanne van Aswegen, for proofreading the newsletter.
- The entire Spider Club committee for their contributions.
- Everyone on the Spider Club Facebook page for all the interesting content.
- All the readers of this newsletter, and all the positive feedback we receive. Of course, keep the negative feedback coming, so that we can improve on this newsletter. All the readers of this newsletter, and all the positive feedback we receive. Of course, keep the negative feedback coming, so that we can improve on this newsletter.



From the hub

Hi spiderers!

Spring is here, which means we will soon be holding spider walks again. It's been a quiet winter, with only one spider identification course held at the Agricultural Research Council (ARC). Jarrod, our events organiser, is planning something for later in the season. The date hasn't been confirmed yet, so we won't include it in the diary at the end of the newsletter. In fact, I've decided to leave out the diary altogether whenever we don't have any confirmed events to promote.

Earlier in September, Ruan Booysen and I held an event for homeschool children in Bloemfontein. It wasn't a Spider Club event, but rather part of Ruan's outreach programme at the National Museum in Bloemfontein. Ruan, our resident arachnologist, is no longer at the University of the Free State and now works at the National Museum. Unfortunately, this means we no longer have access to the university's sweep nets and vials, but I'm sure his position at the National Museum will open up new doors for both him and us. Anyway, we wish Ruan a happy and prosperous future at the museum!

Earlier this year, in February, the Wilderness Project once again travelled to Angola to survey its biodiversity. Ruan Booysen joined a previous expedition as a macro photographer. This time, they invited world-renowned macro photographer Nicky Bay from Singapore, who certainly did a splendid job documenting the microfauna. We would have reported on the trip sooner, but Nicky had about 12 000 photographs to work through before he could finally post a blog about the expedition. You can read about this fascinating trip, and see some of his fantastic photos, on pages 25-31.

Later this year, Nicky, along with Ruan, will travel to Kenya as part of a similar project. We can't wait to report on that expedition! And next year, Nicky and others will host BugShot Borneo, a photographic workshop in the jungles of Borneo. One of our Facebook admins, Kyle Thomas, has already registered for the event. We're looking forward to hearing all about this very unique experience when he reports back next year!

Another long-awaited event next year is the African Arachnological Society (AFRAS) Colloquium in January. I'm not yet sure whether I will attend, but Ruan Booysen certainly will. As in previous years, the Spider Club is offering to sponsor one person's registration fee, which is almost R5 000. The person selected for the sponsorship will have to deliver an arachnid-related presentation. We encourage anyone interested to apply by sending us an abstract of their proposed presentation. See page 5 for more details.

On a final note, I recently created a YouTube channel called Tiny Tutors, featuring educational (and hopefully entertaining) cartoons about arthropods and other small animals, but mostly spiders. These cartoons are all made with artificial intelligence, which is still a highly controversial subject. I hope some of you will at least watch a few episodes before deciding whether it's a crime against nature. I've included some of the spider-related episodes I've made so far on pages 16-18.

Thank you for reading the newsletter, and, as usual, please let us know what you think and how we can improve! Your feedback is what keeps me going.

Happy reading!

- Rudi Steenkamp -

Snippets

Spider Club sponsorship for AFRAS Colloquium

For anyone who wants to attend the next AFRAS Colloquium (10 to 15 January 2027) in Limpopo but cannot afford the R5000 registration fee, the Spider Club of Southern Africa will sponsor one person's registration.

That person will have to deliver a spider-related presentation at the colloquium, and to qualify for the sponsorship, they will have to submit an abstract about their presentation. The committee will choose the best abstract and person to represent the Spider Club at the AFRAS Colloquium.

We have sponsored people at previous colloquiums. At the last AFRAS Colloquium in 2024, we sponsored Wessel Pretorius, who delivered a presentation on the role of citizen science in arachnology.

The Spider Club will only pay the registration fee (R4940); the person will have to arrange and pay for their own transport and accommodation.

If you are interested, submit your abstract (between 150 and 250 words) to info@spiderclub.co.za before 15 October 2026. Let us know if you have any questions.

Fastest spider in the world?

Heteropoda jugulans, the current fastest spider in the world. Photo: swampys (iNaturalist)

In a recent study[1], Australia's brown huntsman spider (*Heteropoda jugulans*; Sparassidae) was declared the world's fastest spider, running at a top speed of 3.59 metres per second. The study used 258 species from 64 families. Sadly, most of these species were from Europe, North America, and Australia, with no mention of African species. Also, while metres per second was used as a metric, the body lengths per second (BLPS) metric, which is a better way to measure speed relative to size, was not mentioned. I'm quite sure that if BLPS is used, some of our African species will feature among the fastest spiders in the world.

[1] Kuchibhotla, S. Kelly, M., Jackel, V., Bane, E., Beck, H.K., Wolff, J.O. & Labonte, D. 2026. Evolutionary biomechanics of maximum running speed in spiders (Araneae). *bioRxiv*. https://doi.org/10.64898/2026.06.11.731532

Erratum (re hollow "horns" of *Ceratogyrus attonitifer*)

In our previous edition, we reported on Nicky Bay's photos of Ceratogyrus attonitifer's "horn" that appears to be hollow, allowing light to pass through. Dr Ian Engelbrecht contacted us and said the following:

"The horn isn't actually hollow, but it is soft and filled with fat, unlike other *Ceratogyrus* where the horn is sclerotised and filled with muscle. I noted this when working on the description, and it raises an intriguing question: why would a spider need a horn filled with fat? I'm hoping we might be able to study this some day; I suspect it serves some kind of metabolic function. For this we'd need a) specimens, and b) someone who studies spider metabolism, neither of which are easy to get!"

Changes in scorpion taxonomy

Lorenzo Prendini recently published a revision[2] of scorpion taxa around the world at family, genus, and species level. The changes that affect Southern Africa are as follows:

- All African *Opistacanthus* species have been moved to *Cheloctonus*.
- *Uroplectes formosus basuticus* → *Uroplectes basuticus* (Lesotho).
- *Uroplectes formosus spenceri* → *Uroplectes spenceri* (South Africa).
- *Uroplectes formosus maculates* → *Uroplectes maculates* (South Africa).
- *Uroplectes carinatus australis* → *Uroplectes australis* (South Africa).
- *Hadogenes troglodytes crassicaudatus* → *Hadogenes crassicaudatus* (Botswana).
- *Hadogenes troglodytes* → *Hadogenes dentatus* (South Africa).
- *Hadogenes troglodytes letabensis* → *Hadogenes letabensis* (South Africa).
- *Hadogenes troglodytes matoppoanus* → *Hadogenes matoppoanus* (Zimbabwe).
- *Hadogenes trichiurus caffer* → *Hadogenes caffer* (South Africa).
- *Hadogenes trichiurus graciloides* → *Hadogenes graciloides* (South Africa).
- *Hadogenes trichiurus pallidus* → *Hadogenes pallidus* (South Africa).
- *Hadogenes trichiurus whitei* → *Hadogenes whitei* (South Africa).
- *Hadogenes parvus* → *Hadogenes whitei*.
- *Hadogenes werneri* → *Hormurus paucidens*.

[2] Prendini, L. 2026. All genera of the world: Order Scorpiones (Animalia: Arthropoda: Arachnida). *Megataxa*, 19(2):270-378. https://doi.org/10.11646/megataxa.19.2.2

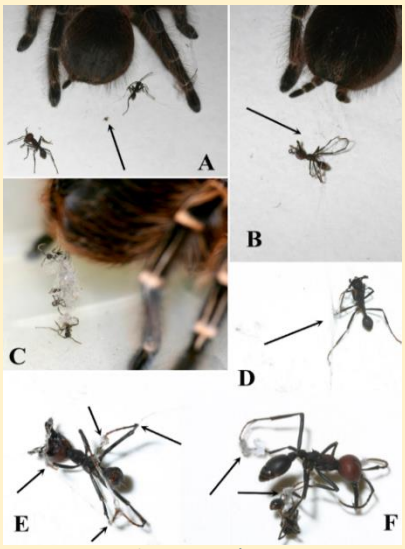


Image credit: Rogério Bertani. https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-026-64167-7

First record of tarantulas using urticating setae against invertebrates

Rogério Bertani posted the following on the Asian Society of Arachnology website regarding his recent study[3]:

The use of urticating setae by tarantulas from the Americas and the Caribbean has been known for centuries and is considered a defensive behaviour against vertebrate predators. However, their passive use against invertebrates, such as parasitic fly maggots and ants, has also been recently proposed, but no active use of these setae against invertebrates has been observed or tested.

In this study, eight tarantula specimens representing four different species from the family Theraphosidae were tested in twelve tests with the army ant *Eciton burchelli* and the carpenter ant *Camponotus rufipes*.

Four spiders interacted with *Eciton burchelli*, and one interacted with *Camponotus rufipes*. The defensive behaviour was distinct from that used against vertebrates, as the spider rubs the lower posterolateral region of the abdomen with downward and outward movements of the hind legs and uses silk threads.

Scanning electron microscopy (SEM) demonstrated that the ants were entangled with urticating setae, primarily of type I morphology. Type I urticating setae are found exclusively in an important clade of theraphosine spiders, the tribe Theraphosini, which includes the largest known spiders.

It is hypothesised here that protection against predation by ants due to the emergence of a specific type of urticating seta may be one of the factors responsible for the success of tarantulas in the New World.


Image credit: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Arthur-Decae

In memoriam: Arthur Decae

Marco Isaia shared the following with the International Society of Arachnology:

Dear friends and colleagues,

It is with enormous sadness that I have to share the news that our colleague and long-standing ESA member Arthur Decae passed away yesterday, after his health had rapidly deteriorated in recent weeks.

Arthur and I had remained in close contact throughout this last difficult year, talking about spiders, work and life until very recently. A few days ago, he wrote to tell me that his time was very short and to say goodbye.

[3] Bertani, R. 2026. Is predation by ants driving the evolution of tarantulas? First report of tarantulas (Araneae, Theraphosidae) actively using urticating setae against invertebrates. *Scientific Reports*, 16(23769). https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-026-64167-7

Among his last messages, he specifically asked me to tell our arachnological community:

"I would appreciate it if you tell our spider friends and let them know how much happiness they have brought into my life."

I think this is the most important message to share. Our community, his friendships, meetings, discussions and, of course, the spiders brought Arthur a great deal of happiness throughout his life.

Earlier this year he also lost his beloved wife Nollie, whom many of us knew, and her absence affected him deeply. Despite everything, Arthur continued working on spiders until very recently, with the same passion and curiosity that we all knew so well.

Arthur has been part of our arachnological community for many years. He was one of the leading experts on European mygalomorph spiders, particularly those of the Mediterranean region, to which he devoted much of his scientific life. But we will remember him not only for his work, but also for his enthusiasm, generosity, friendship and endless passion for spiders. I am sure that many of us will keep very special memories of him.

Farewell, Arthur. We will miss you.

Stunning mite

Odette Curtis photographed this tiny mite at the Haarwegskloof Research Centre in the Overberg, Western Cape. It was found among some moss. Ray Fisher was tagged in her iNaturalist post to see if he knows if it's a described species, but he hasn't responded yet.

Undescribed uloborid

Jandre van Zyl posted this hackled orb-web spider (Uloboridae) on iNaturalist, found near Buysdorp in Limpopo. It's similar to a subadult male we found in Vernon Crookes Nature Reserve in 2020.

Undescribed *Leucorchestris* huntsman spider?

Linda Harris uploaded this *Leucorchestris* huntsman spider, possibly undescribed, from Mowe Bay in Namibia on iNaturalist. A similar observation by Laurent Hesemans, also from Namibia, can be found here. Seven species are known, five of which occur in Namibia and two in Angola.

Beautiful wolf spiders

Cecile Roux photographed these beautiful wolf spiders (Lycosidae) in the Western Cape: the first one at Betty's Bay, and the second and third ones on the dunes at Dwarskersbos.

White sand wolf spider's retreat found

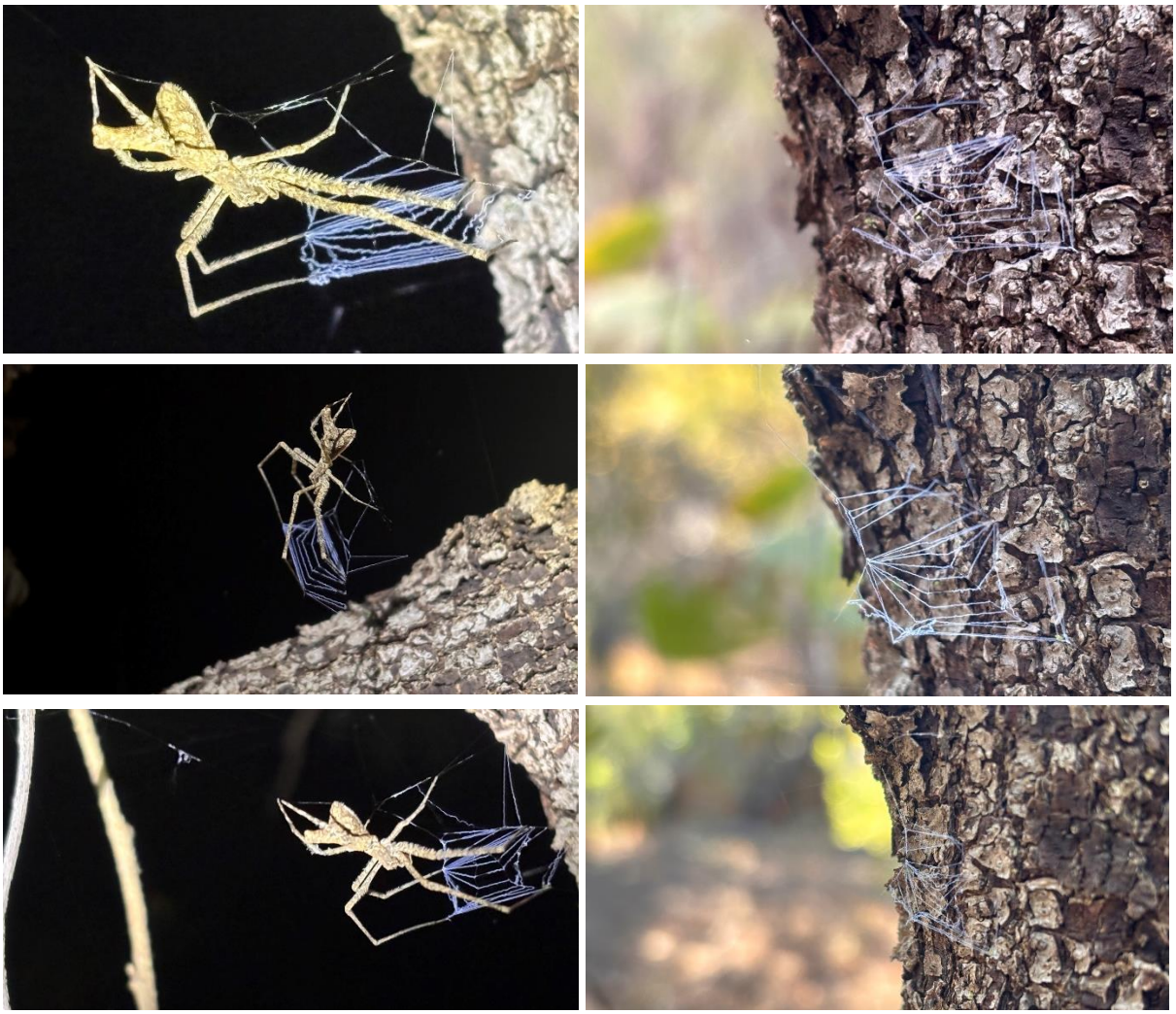
On the topic of wolf spiders, Cecile Roux has in the past photographed these white sand wolf spiders on the dunes of Dwarskersbos in the Western Cape. She posted the following:

A small puzzle solved. I was sitting next to one of the last flowering Euphorbia shrubs at Dwarskersbos, waiting for pollinators to settle down. I scratched in the sand with a grass stem, and pulled up a part of a silk lined funnel by accident. Within seconds, a small whitish spider emerged and started repairing the funnel. It was one of my favourite Dwarskersbos spiders, a small white wolf spider. I watched it for a while, and started looking closely at the sand around me – and there were more tiny openings, with small spiders peering out! So these wolf spiders do construct funnels (tunnels?) and wait in the opening for prey. But they also run free, rapidly returning to the funnel when disturbed. And I don't want to walk on the dunes anymore; we huge, bumbling humans destroy so much without knowing.

Do net-casting spiders recycle their nets?

Len de Beer made an interesting observation about a camel-back net-casting spider (*Menneus camelus*; Deinopidae) that apparently "stores" its net for future use. Len posted the following on iNaturalist:

This particular *Menneus* spider was observed at the exact same tree for 3 days. For me this conclusively indicates that Menneus camelus does re-use its web.



1. The first observation was the first one taken at Jun 26, 2026 8:15 PM SAST. https://www.inaturalist.org/observations/375598438#activity_comment_a955a126-7338-4333-a6e1-38f2d49ba8fe
2. The second observation taken during the day at the same site https://www.inaturalist.org/observations/375900546 Jun 27, 2026 3:55 PM SAST. Note spider absent web poised away from the trunk.
3. The third observation taken at night at the same site https://www.inaturalist.org/observations/375921124 Jun 27, 2026 7:59 PM SAST
4. The fourth observation taken during the day. https://www.inaturalist.org/observations/376108351 Jun 28, 2026 · 9:05 AM SAST
5. The fifth observation of the same spider at night https://www.inaturalist.org/observations/376279592 Jun 28, 2026 · 7:43 PM SAST
6. The sixth and final observation of the now collapsed net during the day https://www.inaturalist.org/observations/376598993 Jun 29, 2026 9:09 AM SAST.

The many faces of the horned bark spider

Jarrod Michael Todd photographed these horned bark spiders (*Caerostris sexcuspidata*; Araneidae) all in the Karkloof forest in KwaZulu-Natal, showing how much this species can vary.

Confirmed violin spider bite

Tannith Bond was recently bitten on her foot by a common violin spider (*Loxosceles simillima*; Sicariidae) when putting on her shoe. She was bitten twice, and went to the doctor a few days later. When asked if she felt the bites, she responded:

"I would not say that it burnt straight away - maybe 5 minutes later I felt a slight burn but when I looked to see what was wrong there was only a tiny bump, more like a mosquito bite. About 4 hours later there was a red circle about the size of a R2 but no swelling. On Sunday morning my foot had swollen, it was red and itchy. On Sunday afternoon I felt a little bit nauseous and I got a slight fever.

Monday the fever had gone but my foot was very swollen and the bite had turned purple and there was a red line starting to move up my leg... So it was then time to see a doctor. Doctor put me on 10Co-Amoxyclave BD Austell antibiotics 1 tab 2x daily for 5 days and I need to rub Supiroban on."

Tannith also reported a rash on her body under her arms and on the left side of her stomach. I followed up with her a month later, and she reported the following:

"I kept the bite site super clean and I did not scratch the actual site, although my foot and body reacted badly to the bite. I got a rash all over my torso, which the doctors say was a reaction to the spider venom. I had to have two rounds of antibiotics. I did not develop necrosis – which I am grateful for.

The bite has healed, but the bridge of my foot remains very sensitive and I can't wear a tight-fitting shoe yet as it hurts if I do. The swelling has completely gone down. You can still see where I was bitten as it has left a purple mark. You will see in the photos that I was bitten twice. One looks like the main bite, and then it looks as if it got me again as I was pulling my foot out of the boot. The doctor says that may be why I reacted so badly to it, as I got a double dose. The colour of my foot has also not returned to being completely normal. My toes are a different colour to the bridge of my foot.

It also dried my skin out on my foot badly. I could put cream on and a few hours later my skin would look like snakeskin. Once it healed, the whole bridge of my foot's skin peeled, from the site of the bite right to the edge where the swelling ended. The doctor said that was because the swelling stretched my skin and when it returned to normal it peeled off."

First record of *Bijoaraneus* in Tanzania?

On iNaturalist, schoggibrot posted an observation of a bum-eyed orb-web spider (*Bijoaraneus* cf. *legonensis*) in Kondoa, Tanzania. According to the World Spider Catalog, *B. legonensis* is the only species recorded in Africa, but lists only South Africa and Ghana. This may then be the first record for Tanzania, and perhaps even the whole of East Africa.

Has the pantropical huntsman spider settled in South Africa?

The pantropical huntsman spider (*Heteropoda venatoria*; Sparassidae) has been spotted in South Africa in a few isolated incidents. Two new observations in Limpopo were recently uploaded on iNaturalist. Both were found in Mankweng, near Polokwane. The first one is a female uploaded by Ben Dibete, and the second one a male, uploaded by Themba Makgoale.

According to the World Spider Catalog, their distribution is “Tropical Asia. Introduced to Pacific Is., North, Central and South America, Macaronesia, Europe, Africa.” They have not officially been listed for South Africa yet.

To view the videos, simply click on each picture.

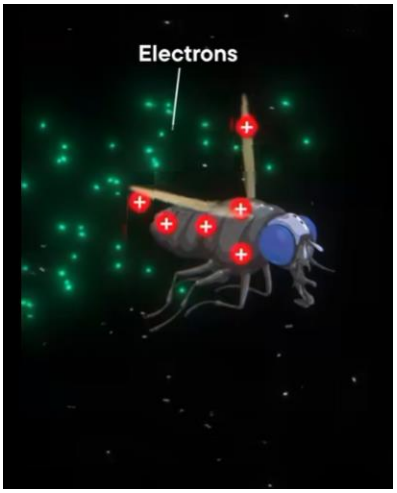
If you know of any videos that we can feature here, please contact us.

Webster, the peacock jumping spider

Just a short video of Webster, a peacock jumping spider (*Maratus volans*; Salticidae) mascot at World Science Festival in Brisbane, Australia.

How flying insects can get stuck in spider web without touching it

This video explains how flying insects can get stuck in a spider's web without even touching it. Simply flying close to the web will attract the web like a magnet, as the flying insect is positively charged, while the web is negatively charged.



More about jumping spiders

Lynette Knott Rudman posted this short video about jumping spiders on her YouTube channel, Amazing Nature Up Close.

Cassai Life Atlas: Angola 2026 trailer

A trailer to the Wilderness Project in Angola in February this year, which was attended by entomologists, botanists, and a herpetologist, as well as people to document the project.

Tiny Tutors

By Rudi Steenkamp

I have always loved cartoons and animated movies, and I still do. I've also always wanted to create animations myself, but the process is simply too time-consuming and complicated. Unfortunately, I can't really draw either!

Then came the recent advancements in artificial intelligence (AI). I decided to purchase a year-long subscription to OpenArt AI – not to create memes or fake videos, but to make educational (and hopefully entertaining) cartoons about spiders, insects, and other small animals that people often overlook.

AI undoubtedly has some very negative effects, particularly on the environment through its consumption of water and energy. I hope, however, that the positive aspects of what I am trying to create will outweigh some of these negative impacts. My hope is that these cartoons will teach children, as well as adults, about the fascinating tiny world around us and perhaps inspire a greater appreciation for it.

I am in no way trying to deceive or mislead anyone, which is why I deliberately use animations rather than presenting AI-generated images as photographs of real animals. Every main character is based on an actual photograph – mostly my own photographs, but also photographs taken by other people who have given me permission to use them. For example, the two spiders in the logo above are based on a *Rhene konradi* jumping spider and an undescribed *Proevippa* wolf spider that I photographed.

Unfortunately, even when real photographs are used as references, AI can still make mistakes when reproducing spider morphology, such as the number of legs or the arrangement of the eyes. These inaccuracies can become even more obvious when spiders are anthropomorphised to give them "cuter" eyes, clothing, facial expressions, and other human characteristics.

Ultimately, my aim is to entertain first and educate second. I know that these cartoons are not a substitute for scientifically accurate photographs or illustrations, but I hope they can spark curiosity and encourage people to take a closer look at the small creatures around them. I hope I succeed in doing that, at least for some people.

On the next page are the spider-related cartoons I have created with OpenArt AI so far. Simply click on the image to go to the YouTube video. Please feel free to subscribe to the channel, and I would really appreciate hearing what you think and any suggestions you may have for improving the cartoons.

Beetle Bluff

A beetle-mimic jumping spider (*Pachyballus* sp.) mimics a small ladybird beetle (*Exochomus* sp.) to avoid predation.

The Better Fisherman

A fishing spider (*Nilus* sp.; Pisauridae) shows a fisherman how to catch fish without a fishing rod.

The Great Fly Heist

A silver thief spider (*Argyrodes argyrodes*) pulls off a daring heist to steal a fly from a golden orb-web spider (*Trichonephila senegalensis*).

Nature's Grossest Camouflage

A bird-dropping orb weaver (*Pasilobus dippenaarae*) fools a bird into thinking it is bird poop.

The Hardest Piggyback Ride

A wolf spider (Lycosidae) mom struggles with her heavy bundle of nosy and noisy babies, until they go their own way.

The Eight-Legged Einstein

A dandy jumping spider (*Portia schultzi*) shows why they are considered the world's smartest spiders.

Rain Spider's Shopping Spree

A common rain spider (*Palystes superciliosus*) annoys a family by stealing their household items for her nest.

Knock Knock. Who's There?

A female cork-lid trapdoor spider (*Stasimopus* sp.) gets annoyed with unwanted guests, until a suitor knocks on her door.

The Hitchhiker's Guide to Spider Eggs

A mantidfly (Mantispidae) larva hitches ride on a wolf spider, waiting for her to lay eggs so that the larva can eat them and use the spider's egg sac as a place to pupate and mature.

The Flower Phantom

A flower crab spider (*Thomisus* sp.) outlaw tries to evade the sheriff and his deputy by changing colour.

Tutu or Not Tutu

A young flattie (*Anyphops* sp.; Selenopidae) aspires to become a ballerina but is laughed at and mocked by the petite ballerinas. After some motivation by her mother, she decides to show the ballerinas the ace up her sleeve: the fastest spin of any land animal.

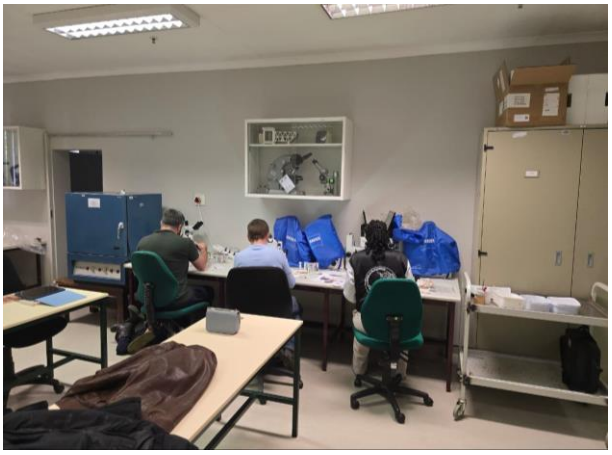
EVENTS

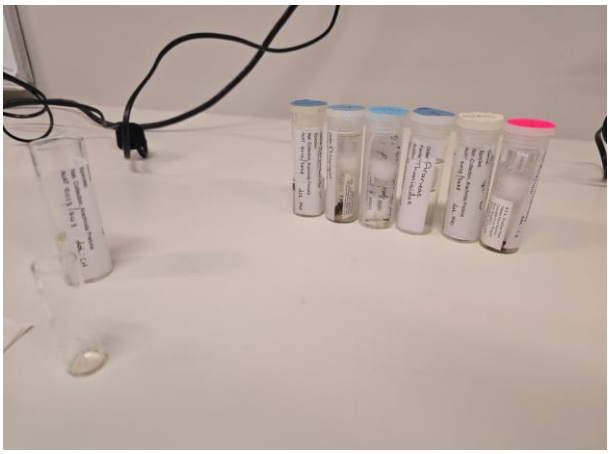
Spider Identification Course:

Agricultural Research Council – Roodeplaat

25 July 2026

No text or reviews are available for this event. Here are a few photos taken by Jarrod Michael Todd of the event.

Walking (running) with young naturalists… and spiders

Free State National Botanical Garden – Bloemfontein

7 September 2026

By Ruan Booysen

A short introduction by Ruan Booysen and Rudi Steenkamp included a Q&A session, medically significant spiders that children should avoid catching, and how to safely catch spiders in vials. Photo supplied.

A couple of months ago I was contacted by Simoné Renaud, the events organiser for the Bloemfontein Homeschooling group, about doing a spider outing with the kids in her homeschool group. This seemed like a great opportunity to let the kids have some fun outside and learn about spiders (and other invertebrates) while they are at it. What parent would not like to send their children on a hunt for eight-legged crawlies… right?

Anyway, the day approached in early September 2026, and the weather was looking a little worrying. The previous day had some good rain, and it was forecasted that the next day would bring some more. As the morning progressed, the weather seemed to play along, allowing the kids to enjoy their first activity for the day… planting spekboom! Shortly after, Rudi and I gave a quick introduction to spiders and a short briefing on how to handle them safely.

Ruan Booysen and Rudi Steenkamp giving an introductory presentation. Photos supplied.

As this was a “mini” spider walk (no pun intended), the participants were allowed to collect the spiders so that they could show us, so handling them safely and gently was important. After the briefing, we were off! About 30 children attended, accompanied by their parents and the organiser. The walk started out great; we explored the main gardens first and found a few flatties (Selenopidae), wolf spiders (Lycosidae), jumping spiders (Salticidae), crab spiders (Thomisidae), along with many other invertebrates such as woodlice (Isopoda: Porcellionidae) and centipedes (Chilopoda). One of the kids even found a rare pirate spider (Mimetidae) with a small crowned nursery-web spider (*Rothus* aethiopicus, Pisauridae) in a web (not sure whose web). They are known to hijack other spiders’ webs and eat the owner.

Left: Female flattie (*Anyphops* sp., Selenopidae). Photo: Ruan Booysen. **Right:** Runcinia grass crab spider (*Runcinia aethiops*; Thomisidae). Photo: Rudi Steenkamp.


Ruan helping the children find some spiders in the grass and leaf litter. Photos supplied.


Female jumping spiders (Salticidae). **Left:** *Rumburax laxus* (Photo: Ruan Booysen). **Right:** *Cyrba nigrimana* (Photo: Rudi Steenkamp).


Left: *Baryphas ahenus* jumping spider (Photo: Rudi Steenkamp). **Right:** Juvenile crowned nursery-web spider (*Rothus aethiopicus*, Pisauridae). Photo: Ruan Booysen.

Left: Wolf spider (Lycosidae) with her egg sac. **Right:** Pirate spider (*Ero* sp.; Mimetidae). Photos: Rudi Steenkamp.

Next, we went up one of the trails heading up the koppie to see what we could find. This is where things got tricky. Typically, when you look for spiders, you spend a couple of minutes at a site to explore, but as we quickly learned, with the kids, we had to keep up with them as all they knew was RUN! Luckily, Simoné was there to help keep them together, and so were the parents. The koppie had a different habitat than the lower areas, mostly consisting of trees, short shrubs and plenty of rocks. Here the kids found several more flatties and a couple of comb-footed spiders, but they mostly ran ahead after that. Rudi and I did some foliage beating in the trees and shrubs using a stick and a net as we walked up the trail to see what we could find. Unfortunately, we did not find as much as we thought we could, but it was still interesting! There were many small undescribed comb-footed spiders of the genus *Theridion*, as well as some running spiders (Philodromidae), flow crab spiders (*Thomisus* sp., Thomisidae), and a grass crab spider (*Oxytate* sp., Thomisidae). Rudi also found an undescribed grass-stitching spiders (*Chariobas* sp., Zodariidae).

Running spiders (Philodromidae). **Left:** *Gephyrota glauca*. **Right:** *Philodromus* sp. Photos. Rudi Steenkamp.

Undescribed female (**left**) and male (**right**) false house button spiders (*Theridion* sp.; Theridiidae). Photos: Rudi Steenkamp. They were both very small (2-3 mm).


Left: Undescribed grass-stitching zodariid (*Chariobas* sp.; Zodariidae). **Right:** Green grass crab spider (*Oxytate* sp.; Thomisidae). Photos: Rudi Steenkamp.

Towards the end of the walk, we gathered everyone's vials to share what we have collected. Someone even found a tiny little pseudoscorpion in the leaf litter! (Fig. 5). The walk seemed like a success as we came across 20 species of arachnids during this short walk, and even better, the kids and their parents seemed to have all enjoyed the outing and, hopefully, took home something good about spiders.


Left: An undescribed pseudoscorpion (Chthoniidae). Photo: Ruan Booysen. **Right:** A pale ground spider (*Theuma* sp.; Prodidomidae). Photo: Rudi Steenkamp.


Left: Dark ground spider (*Zelotes* sp.; Gnaphosidae). **Right:** Leaf-curling sac spider (*Clubiona* sp.; Clubionidae). Photos: Rudi Steenkamp.

Cassai Life Atlas:

Exploring Angola's Hidden Biodiversity

Adapted from text written by Nicky Bay

EDITOR'S NOTE: The following text was adapted from Nicky Bay's article about the Wilderness Project expedition in February this year. The full article and all the magnificent photos he took, with descriptions of each, can be viewed here. All photos by Nicky Bay, unless indicated otherwise.

A group photo taken by Eric Averdung with a drone.

For three weeks in February 2026, I joined the Cassai Life Atlas, a biodiversity survey in the highlands of Angola. This vast plateau is particularly important because it feeds several of Africa's major rivers, including the Okavango, Zambezi, Congo and Cuanza.

The expedition brought together eight local and eight international volunteer specialists, including entomologists, botanists and a herpetologist. There was also a documentation team, local support staff, the organisers from The Wilderness Project, and a mine-clearance crew from the HALO Trust. Their presence was essential because much of the region remains inaccessible due to landmines left from Angola's civil war. Each day, the deminers cleared and marked safe routes before the scientists entered the field.

Angolan kids with weird Asian: While we were hanging around, the Angolan kids would surround us and stare. When I approached them for photos, they ran off. Took a bit of coaxing before they stood still for this.

A Landscape Still Waiting to Be Explored

One of the most remarkable things about the expedition was simply how little of this landscape has been scientifically surveyed. The lack of exploration isn't because the region is uninteresting. For decades, landmines have effectively kept scientists out.

That makes every survey particularly valuable. My role was to document the microfauna, while the other specialists searched for everything from dragonflies, butterflies and orthopterans to frogs, snakes, spiders, beetles, and bats. By the end of the expedition, the specialists already had an idea of how many potentially new species had been encountered. Formal descriptions can take years, but the discoveries were an encouraging indication that there is still a huge amount to learn about the plateau.

From left to right (fltr): lynx spider (*Oxyopes* cf. *flavipalpis*; Oxyopidae), front-eyed trapdoor spider (Idiopinae), flattie (*Selenops* sp.; Selenopidae).

First camp briefing by Rob: With everyone in the camp in attendance, Rob began the camp briefing and introductions.

Looking Closely at the Small Things

As usual, my attention was largely directed towards the creatures that are easiest to overlook.

The expedition produced an extraordinary variety of small animals, including spiders, beetles, true bugs, flies, wasps, moths, katydids, ants, mites, harvestmen and pseudoscorpions. The spider fauna alone included a remarkable assortment of forms, from orb weavers and jumping spiders to crab spiders, huntsman spiders, wolf spiders, trapdoor spiders, and many others.

Some encounters were especially memorable. Angola's spider fauna includes spectacular species such as the horned baboon spiders of the genus *Ceratogyrus*. One Angolan species, *Ceratogyrus attonitifer*, is particularly extraordinary because of its exceptionally long dorsal horn, which extends towards the abdomen.

But spiders were only part of the story. Everywhere we looked there were organisms with unusual shapes, colours, behaviours and adaptations.

Fltr: Ladybird orb weaver (*Isoxya kochi*; Araneidae), giant orb weaver (*Megaraneus* cf. *gabonensis*; Araneidae), horned baboon spider (*Ceratogyrus attonitifer*; Theraphosidae).

Left: River crossing: Sometimes, we would be crossing rivers and Eric would be in the midst documenting everything! **Middle:** Leftovers! If we were at the campsite, lunch would usually be leftovers from last night's dinner. **Right:** Nicky vs stingless bees: Even with this and a fan blowing them away, many would still get behind my glasses.

The expedition was organised as a series of camps and field sites, which allowed the team to investigate different habitats while documenting both biodiversity and the practical realities of working in such a remote area. The resulting photo journal became a mixture of scientific observations, unexpected encounters, and the everyday problems of expedition life.

There were delays, difficult roads, breakdowns, and long journeys. The team had to work around weather, terrain and the logistics of operating far from conventional infrastructure. Yet these inconveniences were balanced by the excitement of finding animals that had rarely, if ever, been photographed in the region.

By the end of the trip, I had taken approximately 12 000 photographs. Around 3 500 edited images were eventually uploaded to Flickr, which means that the photographs presented in the journal represent only a small fraction of everything photographed during the expedition.

Top, fltr: Kite spider (*Gasteracantha milvoides*; Araneidae), mirror spider (*Thwaitesia* sp.; Theridiidae), pirate spider (Mimetidae). **Bottom, fltr:** box kite spider (*Isoxya cicatricosa*; Araneidae), slender grass jumping spider (*Festucula* sp.; Salticidae), crab spider (*Trichopagis* sp.; Thomisidae).

Big waterfall: We made a few trips to this big waterfall. I found that the invertebrate diversity was markedly higher than other sites.

More Than Just a Species Hunt

The Cassai Life Atlas wasn't simply about producing a list of species. The expedition also provided an opportunity to document a landscape whose importance extends far beyond its wildlife. The Angolan highlands act as a major source of water for large parts of southern and central Africa. Understanding what lives there is therefore an important part of understanding what needs to be protected.

The expedition also demonstrated how much cooperation is required to conduct biodiversity research in difficult environments. Scientists could concentrate on finding and documenting organisms because other people were clearing safe routes, maintaining vehicles, providing food, organising transport and keeping the expedition running.

As the expedition came to an end, I have to emphasise the contribution of these people and organisations to making the survey possible.

Fltr: Ladybird orb weaver (*Paraplectana* sp.; Araneidae), fishing spider (*Dolomedes* sp.; Dolomedidae), chrysso comb-footed spider (Chrysso sp.; Theridiidae).

Left: Party in the troopie: Each ride in the troopie would be a boisterous affair at dangerously high decibels. **Right:** Gathering around the campfire after dinner.

The Story Is Far From Over

Perhaps the biggest conclusion from the Cassai Life Atlas is that three weeks was nowhere near enough. Even after an intensive survey, the team was still finding species that had never previously been encountered by the researchers. Many organisms require further examination before scientists can determine whether they truly represent new species, and much of the plateau remains unexplored.

The Cassai Life Atlas therefore offers only a glimpse of what Angola's highlands contain. There are undoubtedly many more species, behaviours and ecological relationships waiting to be discovered.

For a macro photographer, that is perhaps the most exciting conclusion of all: **after three weeks of searching, there was still plenty left to find.**

Top, fltr: bird-dung crab spider (*Phrynarachne* cf. *rugosa*; Thomisidae), box kite spider (*Isoxya* cf. *mucronata*; Araneidae). **Bottom, fltr:** jumping spider (*Veissella* sp.; Salticidae), wandering spider (*Macroctenus kingsleyi*; Ctenidae), green lynx spider (*Peucetia* sp.; Oxyopidae).

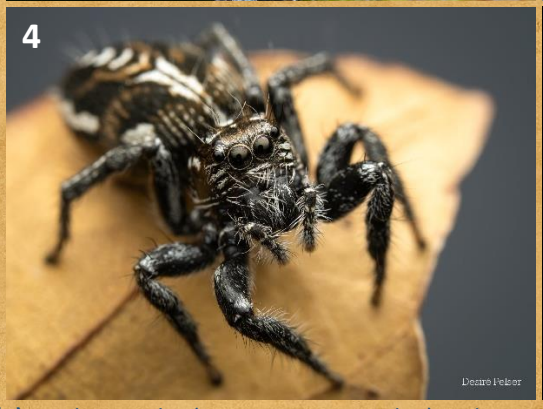
The Expedition Team: None of this happens without the people who did the actual work: the specialists who could identify half of what we found on sight, HALO Trust's demining crew who cleared the way for every field day, our local support crew who kept us fed and our vehicles running, the land support team who got us from site to site, and TWP for holding the whole thing together. Thanks also to TWP's sponsors, who backed a survey with no guarantee of what the expedition would find.

Row 1 (top), fltr: Rob Taylor, Mike Ross, Telmo Antonio, Casper du Plessis, Hansen van Zyl, Alfredo. **Row 2, fltr:** Mingo, Jamuana, Eduardo Ferreira, Chalou, Bart Wursten, Ruben Carlos Culimuena. **Row 3, fltr:** KD Dijkstra, Joaquim Sabino, Reinier Terblanche, Hermann Staude, Gimo Daniel, Piotr Naskrecki. **Row 4, fltr:** Werner Conradie, Laurinda Mandela De Fraga, Eric Averdung, Nicky Bay.

Spider of the Month

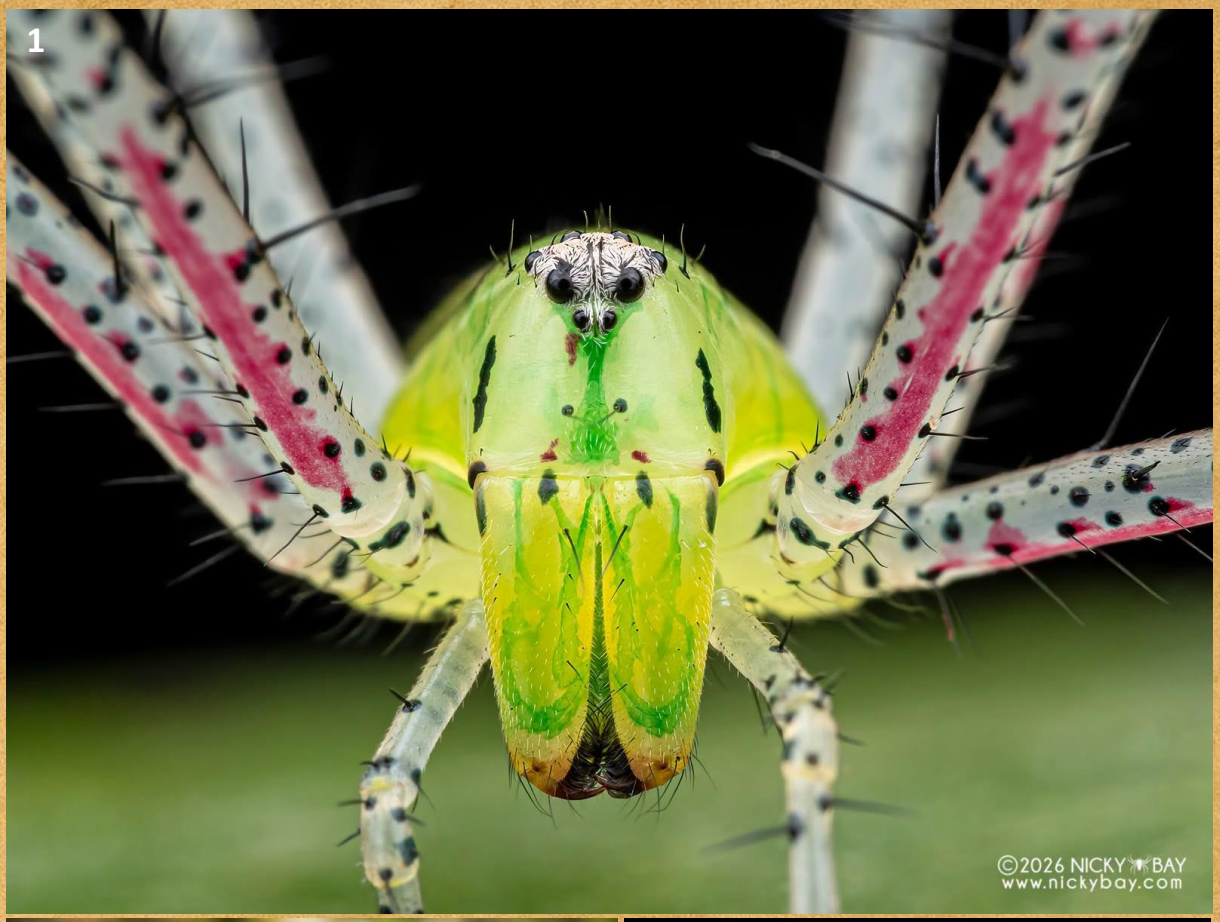
Here are the spiders of the month for July, August, and September. Members of our Facebook group nominate photos throughout the month, and at the beginning of each month, vote in a poll. Click on each winner to read more.

July



(1) Box kite spider (*Isoxya* sp.; Araneidae) Nicky Bay. **(2)** Jumping spider (*Baryphas ahenus*; Salticidae) Steve Bailey. **(3)** Comb-footed spider (*Theridula* sp.; Theridiidae) Kyle Thomas. **(4)** Jumping spider (*Hyllus argyrotoxus*; Salticidae) Desiré Pelser. **(5)** Long-jawed water orb-web spider (*Tetragnatha isidis*; Tetragnathidae) Craig Cordier.

August



(1) Green lynx spider (*Peucetia* sp.; Oxyopidae) Nicky Bay. **(2)** Mushroom comb-footed spider (*Phoroncidia* sp.; Theridiidae) Jarrod Michael Todd. **(3)** Veissella jumping spider (*Veissella* sp.; Salticidae) Nicky Bay. **(4)** Horned bark spider 1 (*Caerostris sexcuspidata*; Araneidae) Jarrod Michael Todd. **(5)** Icius jumping spider (*Icius* sp.; Salticidae) Angus Edward Burns.

June

(1) Mirror spider (*Thwaitesia* sp.; Theridiidae) Nicky Bay. **(2)** Hairy field spider (*Neoscona* sp.; Araneidae) Nicky Bay. **(3)** Burrowing wolf spider (*Hogna* sp.; Lycosidae) Rudi Steenkamp. **(4)** Flower crab spider (*Thomisus* sp.; Thomisidae) Lynette Knott Rudman. **(5)** Rain spider (*Palystes* sp.; Sparassidae) Zsanett Ildiko Muller.

The wonderful world of spiders

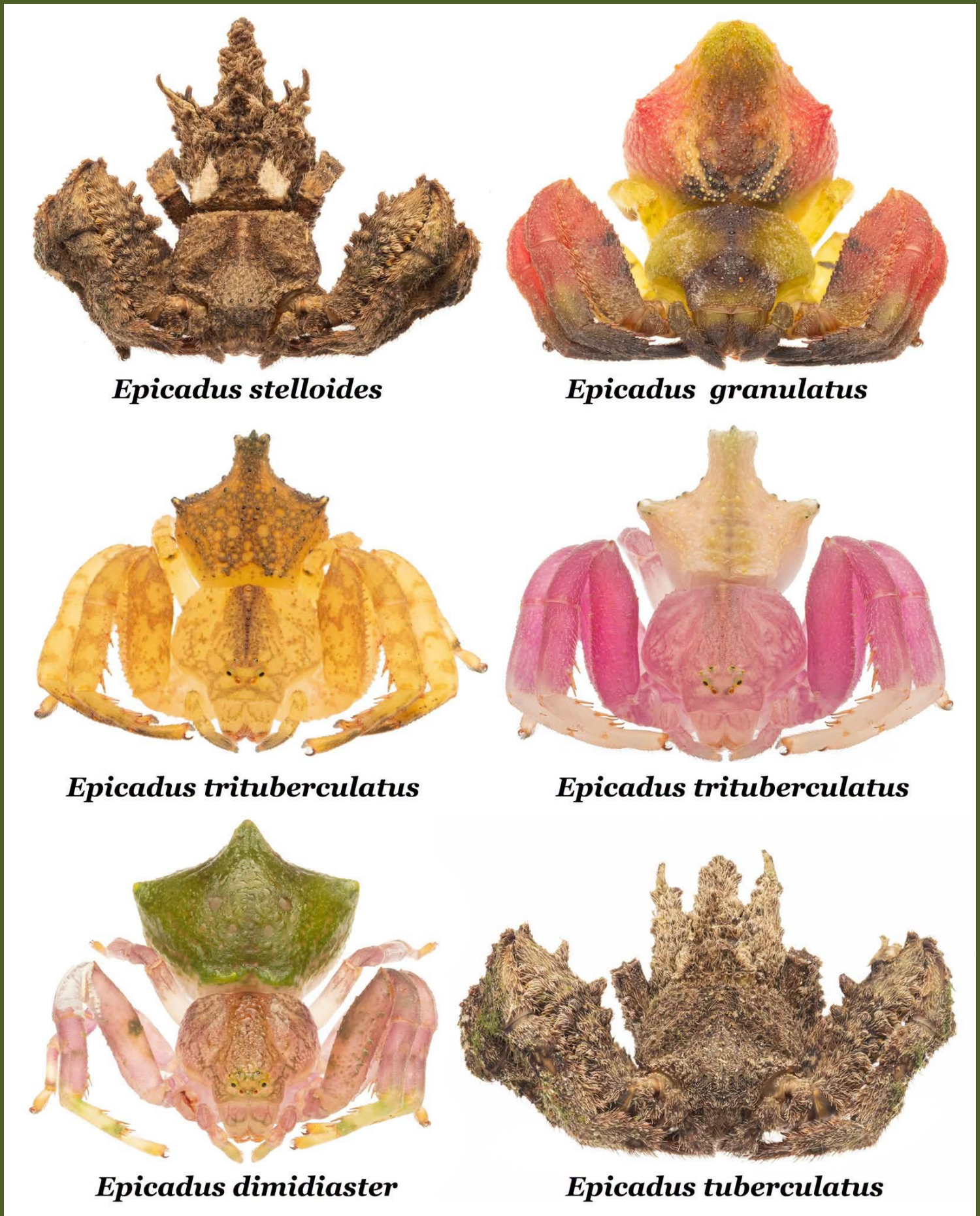
This section showcases spiders from other parts of the world. Click on the photo to go to the Facebook source.

(1) *Araneus circulissparsus* (Araneidae). **Location:** Australia. **Photo:** PWI Photography. **(2)** *Araneus circulissparsus* (Araneidae). **Location:** Australia. **Photo:** Macro Nerd. **(3)** *Araneus talipedatus* (Araneidae). **Location:** Australia. **Photo:** Gary Marchant. **(4)** cf. Chrysso sp. (Theridiidae). Location: Philippines. Photo: lamelsworld.

(5) *Acroaspis* sp. (Araneidae). **Location:** Australia. **Photo:** Craig Loechel. **(6)** *Gelanor altithorax* (Mimetidae). **Location:** Brazil. **Photo:** brabuleta. **(7)** *Hamadruas* sp. (Oxyopidae). **Location:** Malaysia. **Photo:** KangHui Ooi. **(8)** Oxyopidae. **Location:** Not given. **Photo:** Samir Arafat Photography.

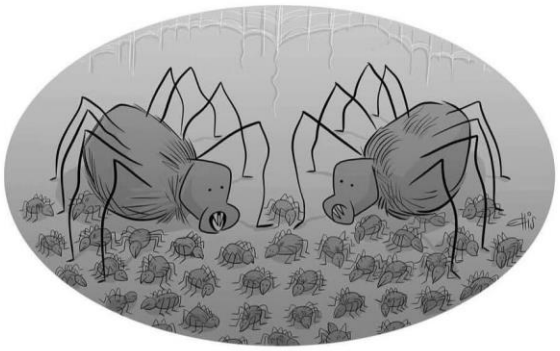
(9) *Propostira* sp. (Theridiidae). **Location:** Singapore. **Photo:** Janice Ang. **(10)** cf. *Cytaea* sp. (Salticidae). **Location:** Indonesia. **Photo:** Jang Storyy. **(11)** *Leucauge* cf. *fastiga* (Tetragnathidae). **Location:** Singapore. **Photo:** Janice Ang. **(12)** *Phrynarachne* sp. (Thomisidae). **Location:** Malaysia. **Photo:** Benjamin Carbuccia.

(13) *Cyrtophora cylindroides* (Araneidae). **Location:** Indonesia. **Photo:** Naiyla Arta Pratama. **(14)** *Bavia* sp. (Salticidae). **Location:** Malaysia. **Photo:** Zuhairi Avian. **(15)** *Arkys curtulus* (Arkyidae). **Location:** Australia. **Photo:** Nick Volpe Wildlife Photography.

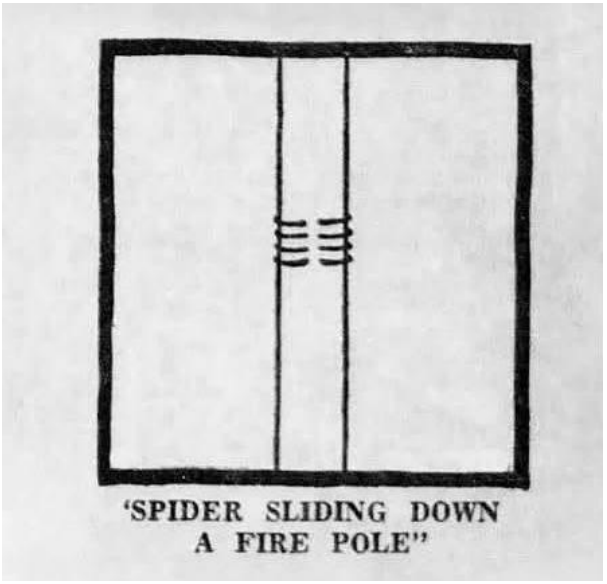


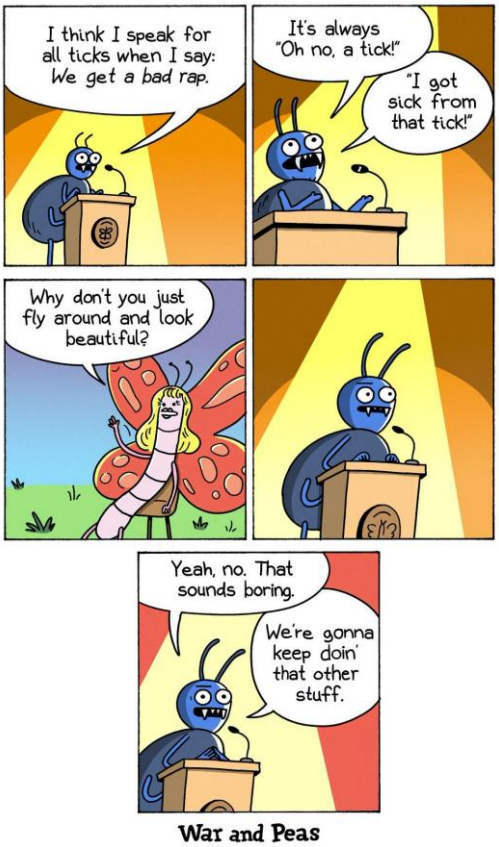
Epicadus spp. (Thomisidae). **Location:** Australia. **Photos:** Nick Volpe.

On a lighter note

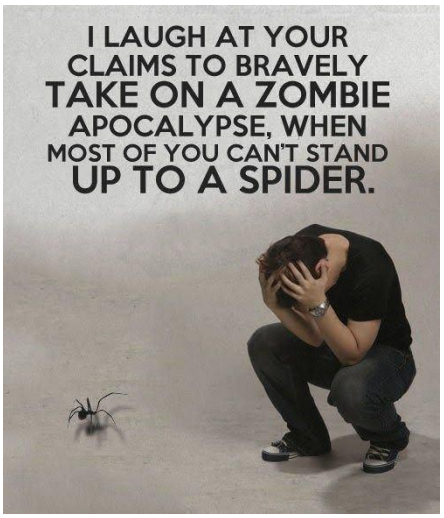


"I just think, given the state of the world, it's unethical to have another thousand kids."



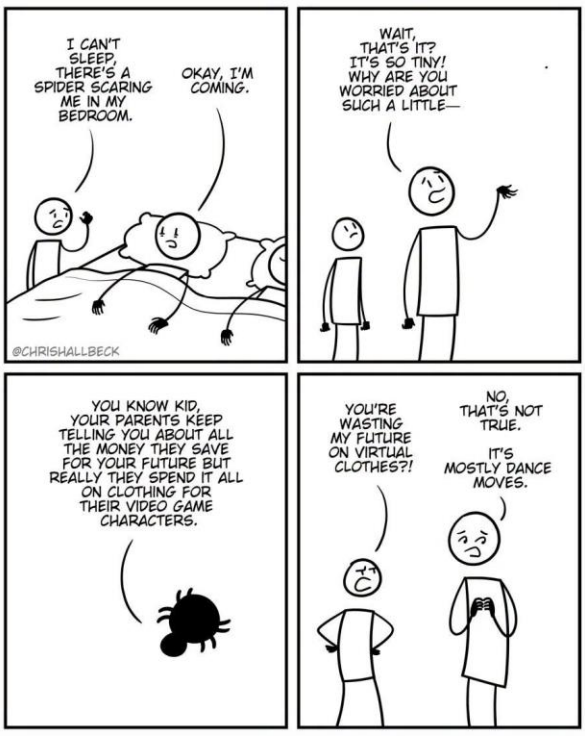


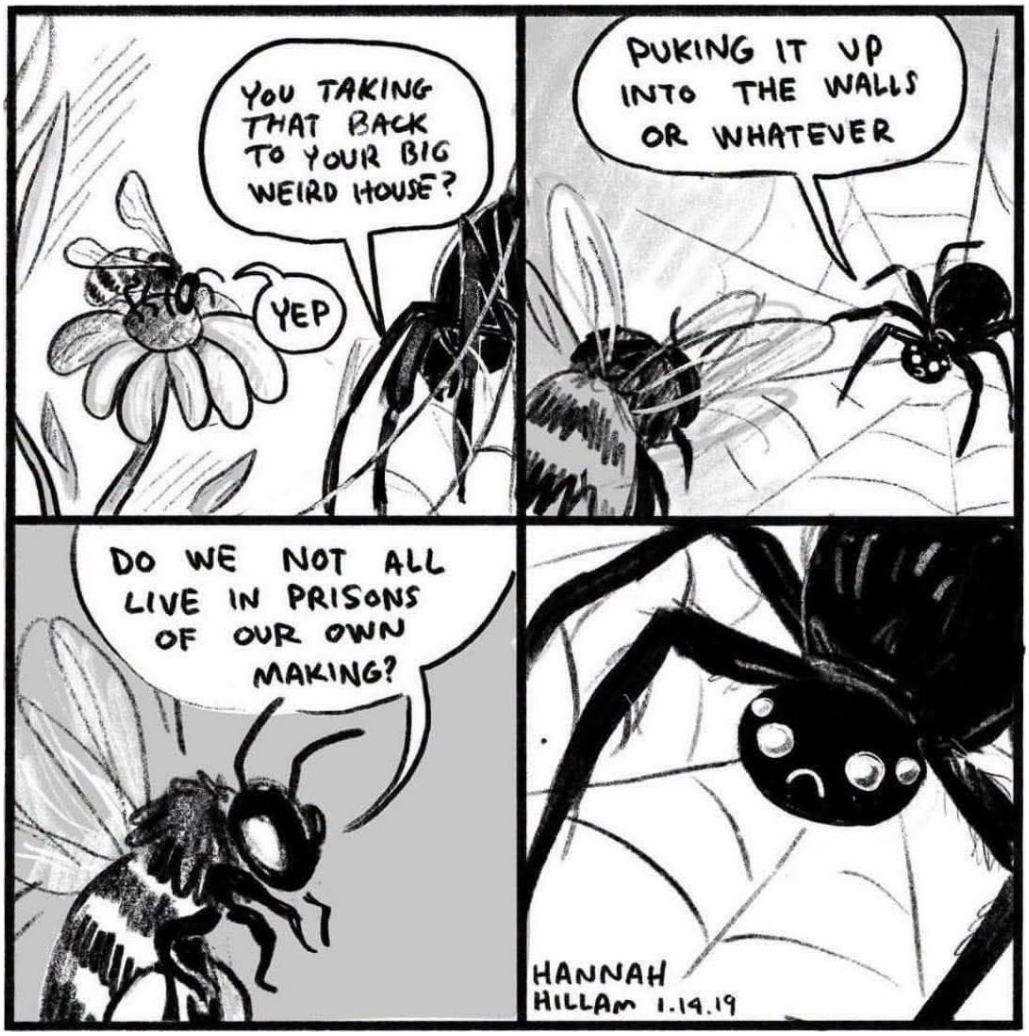
War and Peas

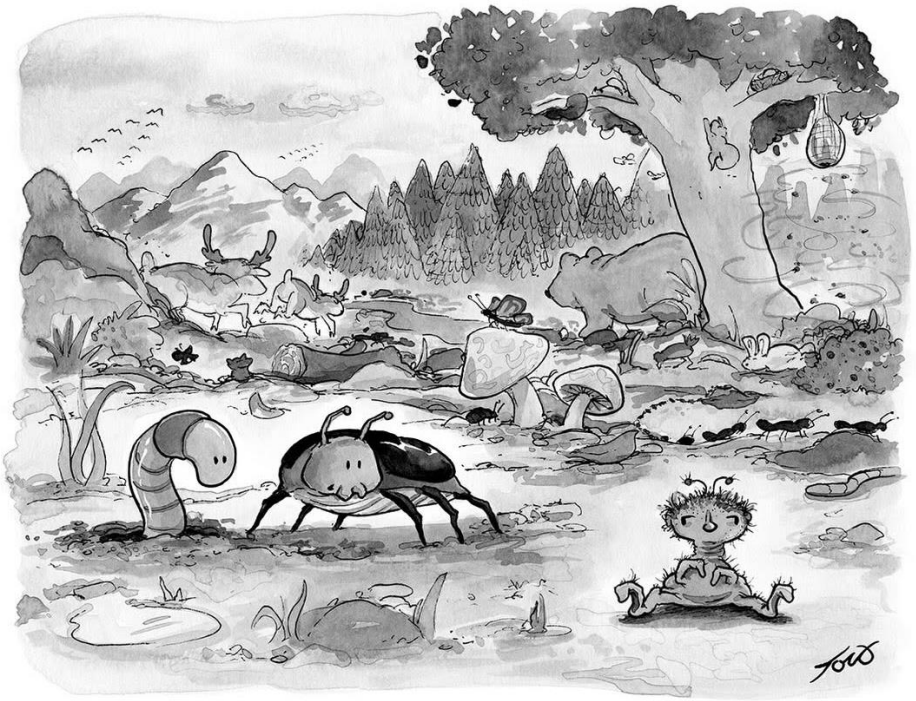



AHH! A CRAB!
NO, NO. THESE ARE OVEN MITTS. I'M BAKING A PIE.
I'M JUST A HUGE SPIDER, SEE?
IT'S LESS SCARY, RIGHT?!
Yes, Yes!
@wawawiwacomics
WAWA WIWA


did you know it's bad luck to kill a spider
where did you hear that
it says so right there
It's bad luck to kill a spider
© liz climo
thelittleworldofliz.com


I CAN'T SLEEP, THERE'S A SPIDER SCARING ME IN MY BEDROOM.
OKAY, I'M COMING.
@CHRISHALLBECK
WAIT, THAT'S IT? IT'S SO TINY! WHY ARE YOU WORRIED ABOUT SUCH A LITTLE—
YOU KNOW KID, YOUR PARENTS KEEP TELLING YOU ABOUT ALL THE MONEY THEY SAVE FOR YOUR FUTURE BUT REALLY THEY SPEND IT ALL ON CLOTHING FOR THEIR VIDEO GAME CHARACTERS.
YOU'RE WASTING MY FUTURE ON VIRTUAL CLOTHES?!
NO, THAT'S NOT TRUE. IT'S MOSTLY DANCE MOVES.





"The ecosystem is a delicate web of interconnected relationships where every living thing plays a vital role—except for Gary. It's unclear what he does."