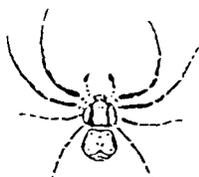


# British Arachnological Society



NEWSLETTER No. 15

SEPTEMBER 1992

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## SPIDER RECORDING SCHEME

### ARGIOPE BRUENNICHI IN BRITAIN

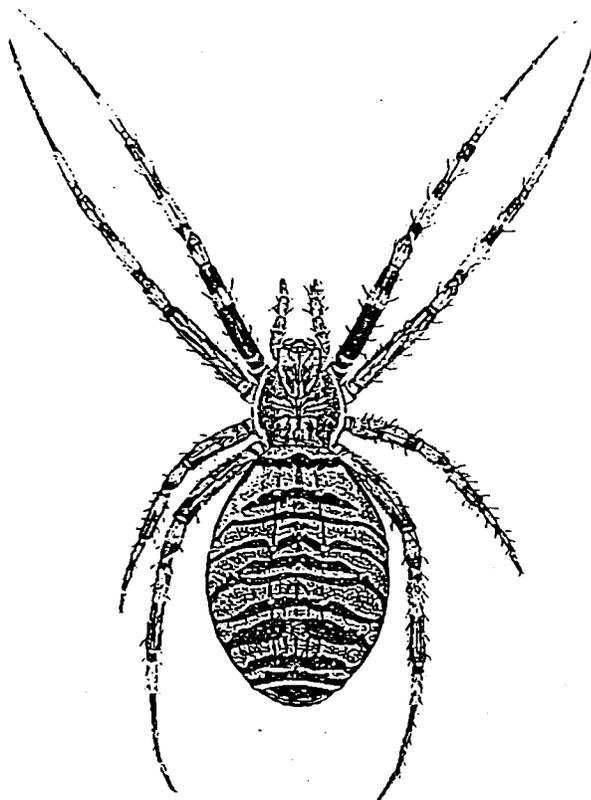
Records this year of Argiope bruennichi in July, one at Gosport and the other near Hastings, encouraged me to spread the net wider and letters were sent to Area Organisers in the south of England and to a few other arachnologists. They were asked to look for this species in their areas and report back to me. Poor weather in the south for much of the summer has resulted in no such reports reaching me. However, Dr Peter Merrett responded by writing an excellent summary of the present status of this species in Dorset. He writes:

The general trend of distribution change is shown in my paper in Bulletin Vol4(8) That paper was written in 1978, but the pattern of distribution has not changed greatly since. It probably occurs in nearly all lkm squares where there is waste ground in the Pool/Bournemouth area, around Poole harbour and near Weymouth.

Apart from Dorset, it has been known for a long time in the Portsmouth and Southampton areas, and has been found west of Southampton Water and on the north coast of the Isle of Wight. I expect it is scattered all along the Dorset and Hampshire coast, but much of the latter is either inaccessible or generally unsalubrious for collecting (just the sort of places where Argiope tends to occur!). Similarly, I don't know of any records west of Weymouth, but I expect it is there. Again, the coast is difficult to get to because of Chesil Beach and the Fleet.

Populations fluctuate a lot from year to year depending on the weather, and they move around a lot as well. They can be common in one place one year, then disappear and move somewhere else the next year.

This has been a poor year for Argiope around here. They had a very poor breeding season last year because of the cool summer, and it will probably be worse this year. They had good breeding seasons in the hot dry summers of 1989 and 1990, with the result that they were very abundant last year, but comparatively few managed to mature in time to breed. As an example, last year I counted 72 individuals in less than an hour in one field up the road from here, but this year I have seen only 27 altogether.



Photocopied and reduced, with permission, from Mike Roberts' "The Spiders of Great Britain & Ireland."

( *Argiope bruennichi* in Britain, cont.)

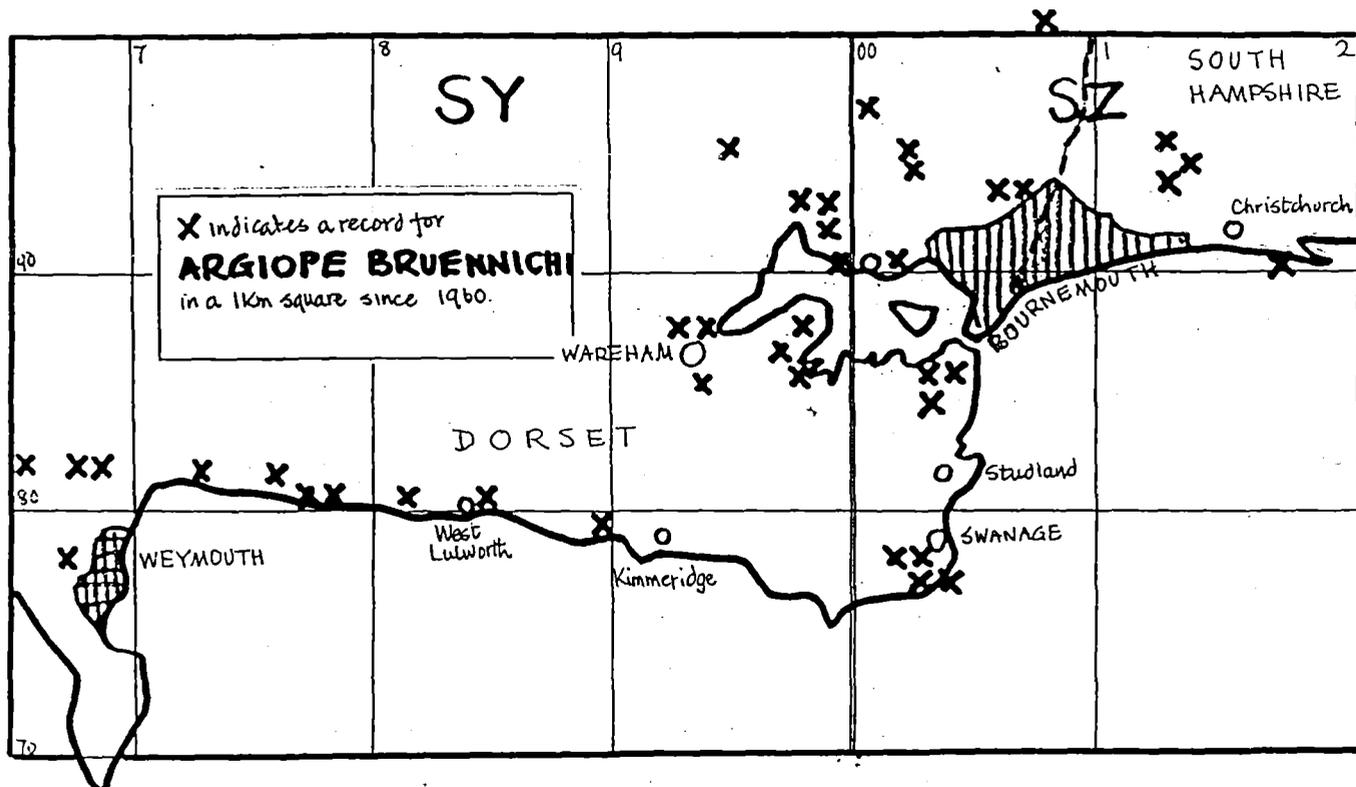
I think what limits them is that as they mature in one season, they need it to be hot and dry in order to grow and mature quickly enough before autumn sets in and the supply of grasshoppers disappears. Also, males are only around for about a week or so, and if females mature too late there are no males left to mate with. They can't tolerate grass that gets too tall and lank in cool summers like this year. They then seem to move to areas where the vegetation is more sparse and exposed to the sun.

It is possibly no coincidence that in 1989 and 1990 (good years for *Argiope*), *Araneus diadematus* was very scarce, but became common in 1991 and 1992 which were bad for *Argiope*. They would not compete directly, but *diadematus* probably favours cooler damper conditions, so can't do well at the same time as *Argiope*. In 1990 *diadematus* was almost completely absent in open dry places, and I could find it only in damper shady places.

Much of the above may apply only locally - I have looked for *Argiope* this year and last within a mile or so of where I live!

I have recently formed a theory that *Argiope* egg sacs may sometimes be carried around in bales of hay, having several times found them in places where animals such as horses are kept, and after seeing hay being taken away from a field where *Argiope* live. The young don't emerge from the egg sacs until April, and then grow very rapidly to mature by early August in a good year.

(Dr Peter Merrett, 6 Hillcrest, Durlston Road, Swanage, Dorset. BHL9 2HS)



Only two 1992 records of *Argiope bruennichi* have been received so far this year: they are:

"In long grass by ditches alongside the River Brede at TQ 841175. A female on a web on south side of ditch on 6th August, discovered by Miss Hemming identified by Mr Ralph Hobbs of 15 Greenacres, Westfield, Hastings. A second smaller female on web in a similar position on 15th August was recorded by Mr Hobbs".

Mr S J Moore (SRS no. 83) sent in a completed GEN14 card, recording a colony a of *A. bruennichi* on the Old Parade ground at Priddy's Hard, Gosport, Hants SU 616014 on 21st July 1992. The parade ground is made of loose gravel on which grass is growing to a height of 1.5 metres. There were many webs. Grasshoppers keep the spiders well fed.

KINDROGAN MEMORIES

Anyone who has ever been spider hunting with Mike Roberts will know what a restful and relaxing experience it is. In anticipation that the 1991 encounter would prove no exception, the able, the willing and the totally unfit converged on Kindrogan.

The lure of the superb Perthshire countryside bathed in constant sunshine, together with the opportunity of expert tutelage from the languorously laid-back Mike, proved irresistible to the following fourteen serene souls: Richard Bacon, Isobel Baldwin, Dave Carr, Peter Collins, Mike Davidson, Livya Henderickx, David Henshaw, John and Pam Hooper, Doug Marriott, Peter Merrett, Mike Pugh, John Stanney and Jim Stewart. All had enjoyed idyllic journeys - especially those who had sallied up the sleepy M6, but the invisible award for the furthest travelled went to Livya starting as she did from Brasschaat in Belgium.

Our first evenings assemblage gave Mike and Debbie the opportunity to look us over and, after checking habitat selection, territorial rights and logistic shortfall, to supply each of us with a name tag. This disclosed the presence of a duo of Davids and Johns, a pair of Peters and a medley of Mikes. Next, from a large bag, Big Mike produced an eccentric collection of headgear and invited us to select 'something suitable for evening wear'. From now on, The Donning of the Hat during identification sessions would provide Mike with an eye-catching signal that the wearer was suffering a spider identification crisis. No more cries for help, no more cricked necks and waving hands: henceforth, while awaiting rescue, the wearer - now with both hands free - would be able to carry on working.

In deference to those still suffering travel-lag, the first days collecting was conducted locally on Kindrogan Hill. Happily, the overnight deluge had abated and we sallied forth in optimistic mood into the soggy undergrowth. The anticipated cull of Lepthyphantes expunctus did not materialize but the day count of 81 species was the second highest of the week (superseded only by the Black Wood of Rannoch). That evening we performed the hat-trick and could be variously observed bizarrely bedizened in fez, flying helmet, bowler hat, baseball cap, country straw, continental beret and precariously perched toucan bonnet.

Monday saw us driving north through Glen Shee to the foot of The Cairnwell, which at over 3000 mist-clad feet qualifies for Munro status. By reason of its shape it is known in the Gaelic as Carn Bhalg which sadly and less poetically translates as 'hill of the bags'. The fit and able assailed this minor molehill with enthusiasm and alacrity while I, deciding that those ahead could safely be entrusted with the hunt for the montane, cruised about lower down in search of the mundane. On that slightly dampish day, The Cairnwell produced 51 species (15 not found elsewhere) including Tiso aestivus, Hilaira frigida and pervicax and Lepthyphantes whymeri

Our next outing was to a rather wet Milton Wood NNR, the approach to which was via a series of delightful muddy drops and slides. We divested the wood of 73 species but spared its most notable asset - a rare and fabled lichen secured to its tree by a nail.

The following day was spent testing the reputation of The Black Wood of Rannoch, a two thousand acre remnant of the Old Caledonian pine forest present since the retreat of the ice and long considered 'the acme of desolations in the Highlands of Scotland'. It was scheduled for felling in 1918 but the ending of the First War precluded this particular action. However, in the second conflict, it was not so lucky and today a vast area of yellow deal sawdust is all that remains of too many good timber trees.

(Kindrogan Memories, ctd.)

Fortunately there is much that prospers and we sortied out in the sun amongst huge branched pines, six foot high bracken, pockets of sphagnum moss and millions of pine needles. In return, we were generously rewarded with 83 species including: Clubiona subsultans, Philodromus margaritatus, Dipoena torva and Robertus scoticus - and the much anticipated (if more common) Lepthyphantes expunctus. As expected, the Black Wood finished top of the league both in the quantity and the quality of its product.

Our visit next day to Glen Tilt was also remarkable, if only because Big but sleepy Mike managed to lose half his party. In a single deceptively simple manoeuvre, the leading cars complete with navigator became the tail-end charlies and promptly vanished. We managed to meet up eventually and, after some discussion, persuaded two sites in Glen Tilt to render unto us a cumulative total of 81 species.

On the final day Big Mike conducted us, with assiduous diligence, to Killiekrankie NNR where we responded by collecting 71 species (8 of them not otherwise encountered) This included Peter Merrett's second record at this site of the beautiful Araneus alsine hiding in the curled, dead leaves of stunted water-side birch. In the afternoon we moved on to Inverack Meadow alongside the River Garry, reached by a small but severely oscillating suspension footbridge. The waterside vegetation was diligently beaten and swept, and much time was devoted to rearranging the riverside schist under the interested eye of various passers-by. This last short bout of fast-forward collecting produced 36 species, including Milleriana inerrans.

I am inclined to draw a veil over some aspects of the concluding evening, even though photographic evidence does exist and is available for a small fee. Suffice it to say that the arrival at the upstairs bar of a chorus of sixteen peculiarly-hatted and already partially refreshed arachnologists caused a wee bit of a stir.

And then came Saturday. With farewells said and departures made, quite suddenly Kindrogan was silent.

Isobel Baldwin, Royal Museum of Scotland, Chambers Street, Edinburgh. EHL 1JF.

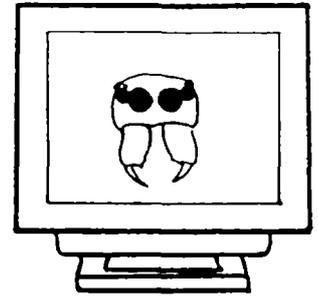
#### ABNORMAL FORM OF SALTICUS SCENICUS

Alan G Scott (SRS no. 37) visited Wigtownshire this summer and noted a colony of Salticus scenicus on a rocky beach near Port William. The beach runs alongside the coastal road and is composed of large pebbles and boulders with a strip of mixed vegetation separating it from the road. The active spiders disappear among the pebbles far faster than they can be exposed; consequently only those which were sheltering within retreats were captured. No males were therefore inspected.

There were two main features that were noticeable. Firstly, the complete absence of white abdominal stripes, and secondly, the construction of the retreat. The outer surface of the latter was studded with small chips of stone that must have been brought from a distance as there were none lying free at that depth. In one instance, there was a chip of coloured glass. None of the nearby and equally numerous retreats of Drassodes lapidosus were so adorned.

A similar specimen was taken one mile inland from the beach.

Ian Morgan (SRS no.110) has also recorded a dark form of Salticus scenicus this summer on a coastal site near Pembrey (SN 393067).



## COMPUTERISATION and the S.R.S. Part II

My primary role in this process is to facilitate data transfer from recorders with information in machine readable form into a central database. I propose to use the environmental recording package RECORDER for this purpose.

RECORDER is a truly relational database written in Advanced Revelation (AREV). It has been designed around the four basic items of information essential to a biological record:

WHO?	The source of the information.
WHAT?	The species name.
WHERE?	The location of the record.
WHEN?	The date of the record.

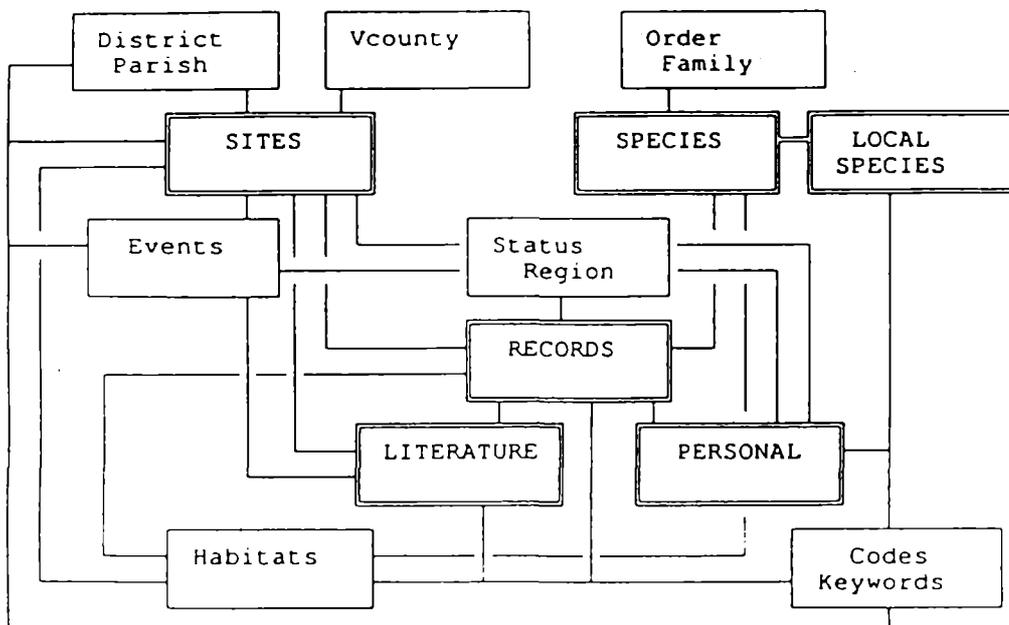
Direct input to RECORDER is very straight-forward. Importing data from other systems however needs a little bit of work. This is the particular area I hope to develop on behalf of the S.R.S. I am NOT an expert programmer but I DO have access to the program designer! More to the point, I have some practical experience of manipulating data within a similar database ('parent of RECORDER: the Invertebrate Site Register database).

### HOW TO EXPORT DATA TO RECORDER

- 1) Let me know
  - a) that you wish to contribute computerised records to the S.R.S.
  - b) what form your data is held in
  - c) what export facilities you have from your data holdings
- 2) I will
  - a) welcome your data (I can deal with either 3.5" or 5.25" disks)
  - b) find out how best to import your data into RECORDER
  - c) provide you with hard copy of your converted data to check (if you wish)

The data should contain the same minimum of information outlined on an RA65 card, an exception being that either vice county or modern county may be provided: RECORDER will generate the other. Generic abbreviations may be acceptable, but on the whole I would prefer full names.

The detailed file structure of RECORDER is shown below:



Main files are identified by double lines and subsidiary files by single line boxes

The following descriptions summarise the contents of the files:

CODES	contains codes that are used throughout the system with their explanatory labels (e.g. a vice-county code, V/66, Durham).
DISTRICT.PARISH	Information about local authority districts and parishes. Used to collect information together for such areas.
EVENTS	Occurrences related to sites such as visits by naturalists' groups, management work, etc. Allows the nature of the event, date, personal records and documents to be recorded.
HABITATS	Habitat codes belonging to various coding systems, and their explanatory labels.
KEYWORDS	list of keywords used in various files.
LITERATURE	references to documents including their author(s), date, location, publication status and keywords.
LOCAL.SPECIES	the SPECIES file is centrally maintained to ensure that all users are referring to a standard dictionary. Consequently users are discouraged from changing it. This file allows additional information to be added about species concerning local status etc.
ORDER.FAMILY	taxonomic sorting codes and names of orders and families.
PERSONAL	details about people who may be recorders, determiners, site managers, etc. Can include name, address, telephone number(s), and biographical details.
RECORDS	the occurrence of a particular taxon at a particular location on a particular date. Can include information about the source of the record (recorder, determiner, literature reference) and additional details like abundance, life history, stage, etc.
SITES	information about named areas, including location, status (Nature reserve, SSSI, etc.), habitats, uses, management and many other features.
SPECIES	list of taxa which can be recorded. Includes name, conservation status, and information about biology.
STATUS.REGION	defines the regions used in the regionalised status system.
VCOUNTY	information about the occurrences of vice-counties and modern counties within 10km squares. Used to validate grid references.

I've given this rather long-winded account of the file structures so that people can see how their own files might fit into the scheme of things. The media and format of data transfer will I suspect need to be tailored to individual needs, but as a guide the following set ups have worked in the past:

Lotus 1-2-3 and dBASE III files are directly compatible with AREV and hence RECORDER.

Data provided in fixed format files i.e. a series of pre-defined columns which can be picked up and placed into the relevant fields in RECORDER.

ASCII files can be converted as long as the information provided is delimited using 'unusual' symbols such as \ or # or \$. The backslash is favoured symbol in the following form SITE\GRID\DATE\ETC.

It is also worth mentioning here that I shall be registering the S.R.S. under the Data Protection Act (1984). This keeps us within the requirements of the law and reminds individuals that they have free access to any information associated with their name (not that I would have it otherwise!).

In summary then, I look forward to hearing from all of you who, like me, could not face the prospect of filling out hundreds of RA65's by hand!

Deborah Procter, JNCC, Monkstone House, City Road, Peterborough PE1 1JY. Tel:(0733) 62626 wk. or (0366) 384604 hm.  
Fax:(0733) 555948.

IN BRIEF

New Recorders: Two new recorders have been registered this quarter. They are:  
 Mr Michael Longdon, Sanderlings, 12 Western Esplanade, BROADSTAIRS, Kent CT10 1TD (SRS no. 146)  
 Mr Jon Daws, 19 The Portway, LEICESTER LE5 OPT (SRS no.147)

Change of Address: Mr P Hampson (SRS no 104) now lives at: Pond House,  
 23 Farm View, North Walsham, Norfolk. NR28 9UY

Request for Specimens: Tom Thomas, Area Organiser for Bedfordshire, asks if anyone would send him specimens of male and female Trochosa spinipalpis, for which he would be most grateful. His address is: 142 Selbourne Road, Luton LU4 8LS.

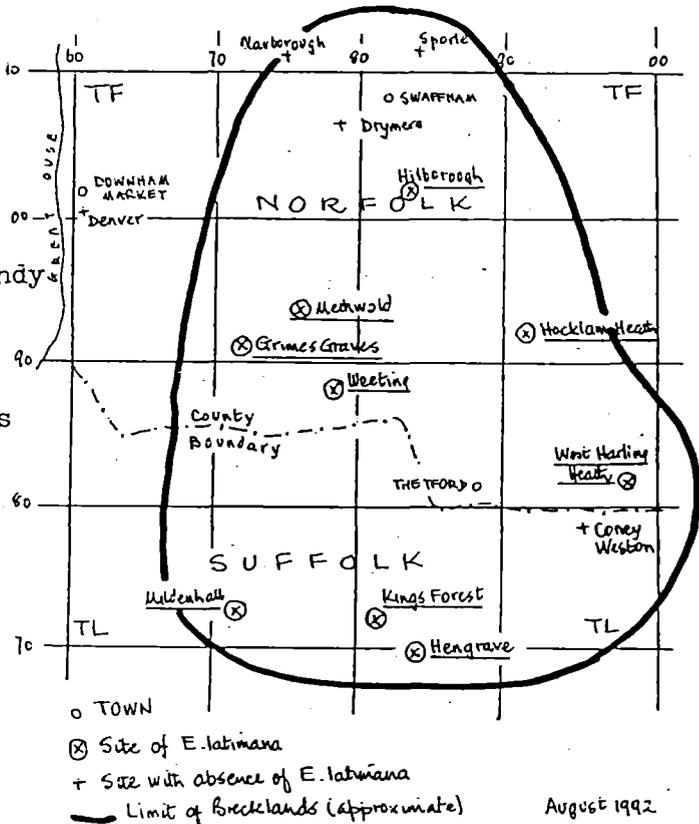
ENOPLOGNATHA LATIMANA:

Geoff Oxford continues his work on the Habitat-preferences and Genetics of E. latimana, and has spent some time this summer in the Brecklands where he had discovered in 1989 a well-established colony of this species.

The Brecklands is an area of sandy soil overlying chalk. It is not very fertile, and the region is developed to grow conifers.

E. latimana seems to favour areas of poor, open grassland with a diverse flora (see articles by Oxford in SRS Newsletter no.10, and by Harvey in SRS Newsletter no.11). They are found characteristically in the rides of the Breckland forests. Not all apparently suitable sites were found to be inhabited by the species, while E. ovata was common everywhere.

David Nellist has recorded E. latimana this summer on Croxley Common Moor in Herts.



ENOPLOGNATHA LATIMANA SITES IN THE BRECKLANDS.

STEATODA NOBILIS

Chris Topping (AO for Sussex) reports on the huge increase this year on the number of specimens of Steatoda nobilis in Littlehampton. "I would estimate it is as common as Tegenaria in and around this area. I even had one that fell out of the roof cavity in my house and went down the neck of my shirt. Luckily I survived unscathed."