

# British Arachnological Society



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## ***SPIDER RECORDING SCHEME***

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### NEWSLETTER NUMBER 34 July 1999

Members will have read in the last Newsletter (No. 33, March 1999) that I have agreed to take over from David Nellist as the new National Organiser for the scheme. I would like to take this opportunity to thank David for his many years of hard work and wish him well in his future active fieldwork! I am very grateful to David for agreeing to continue as a member of the SRS Committee for the British Arachnological Society and I will be relying on him to help me with his expertise and support.

Peter Harvey

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# STOP PRESS

**Data input from RA65 cards is starting shortly.  
The deadline for all data is the end of this year.**

Please make sure you send in all record cards and computerised data by this deadline. Anything received later than this deadline will not be included in the published atlas and we have no timetable for a second edition.

Stan Dobson is continuing to act as the central point for computerised data. Please note that **computerised data** can now include all species, although the use of the rare species GEN14 cards is still important as a means to maintain detailed information for these species.

**If you hold data on computer and have not already done so please contact Stan Dobson** at Moor Edge, Birch Vale, High Peak, Derbyshire SK22 1BX to ensure your data is compatible. Stan is happy to help get your data into the right form, but not just before the deadline!

**I would also appeal to all members holding computerised data** to notify me where there may be a significant overlap between data on RA65 cards and data available in digital form. The job of weeding out duplicate records is complex and time consuming. Data already available in digital form is preferred.

**We have a massive task ahead** completing species accounts for all the British species. As you will read further on in this Newsletter the process has been started and **we need your help** to make sure the information is accurate and useful.

**We also have a massive task ahead** checking data entry and looking for anomalous records. **We need the help** of Area Organisers and other volunteers in this. The plan is for BRC to enter data on a county by county basis and then for regional volunteers to check the data entry against the cards. We hope all Area Organisers will want to check their own areas and for some to take on other counties not covered by an AO. Regional maps will be made available to help show up anomalous records. It will be an opportunity for volunteers to see the outcome of their efforts!

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## Rare Salticids in Scotland

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**Jim Stewart, 109 Greenbank Crescent, Edinburgh, EH10 5TA**

While attending the Edinburgh Colloquium in July 1997, Lars Jonsson collected a few spiders in Holyrood Park. Among them were some specimens of the salticid spider *Neon robustus*, a Scandinavian species previously unknown from Britain. A paper on this discovery is in preparation for publication in the BAS Bulletin.

During the summer of 1998, also in Holyrood Park, specimens of the Nationally Notable (Nb) species *Aelurillus v-insignatus* were found on short turfed, stony ground with a southern exposure. The only previous Scottish occurrence for this species was recorded by William Evans, an Edinburgh naturalist, on a railway embankment site on the south coast of Fife in 1895. In spring of this year 1999 *Aelurillus* has been observed on or around different rocky areas in Holyrood Park, and Gordon Corbet has confirmed its continued existence at the Fife railway site after more than 100 years. Yet another colony of the species has been found recently by Keith Bland on the south rocky face of Kinnoull Hill in Perth.

The distribution of *Sitticus pubescens* in Scotland has been enhanced by its discovery on Calton Hill which lies within a kilometer of Holyrood Park. Although fairly widely distributed in England, the only earlier record for Scotland was from the island of Muck in 1983.

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## Provisional species accounts and distribution maps

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All the RA65 card data sent in since the start of the scheme is at Monks Wood and the national distribution data cannot be accessed until BRC have completed data input. In theory all the data for rare species not listed on RA65 cards should be available on the GEN14 cards. However examination of all the GEN14 cards sent in since the scheme started shows that this is clearly not the case and there are many records which have not yet been fed into the system. At the moment it is therefore only possible to produce provisional distribution maps for very rare species known from a few well-known sites and other species where I can be reasonably certain all the data is available.

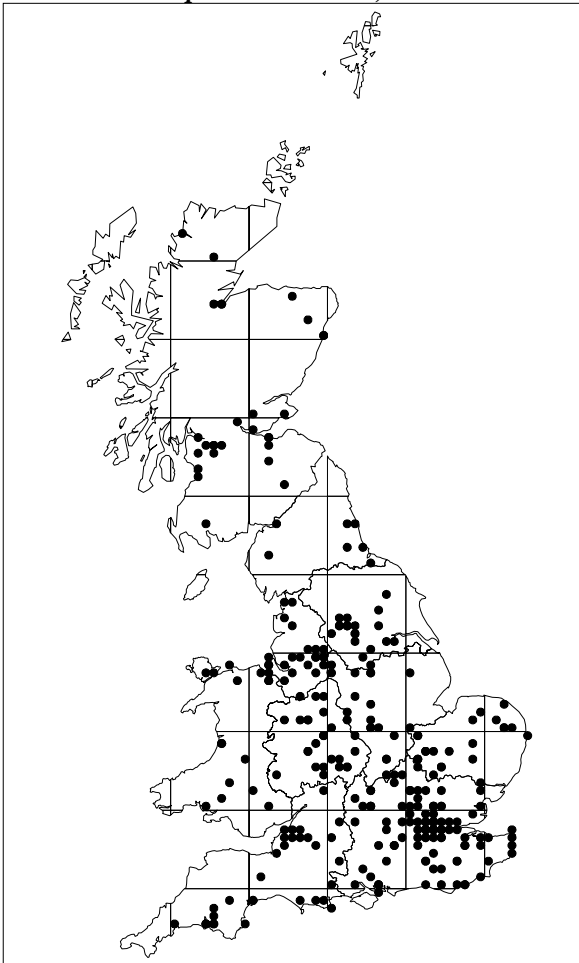
This newsletter includes provisional maps and species accounts for two species, *Zodarion italicum* and *Philodromus longipalpis*. Both species are of ecological interest and may be overlooked in parts of southern England. I am grateful to Eric Philp and Edward Milner for providing details of several Kent and Middlesex records of *Zodarion italicum*.

The urgent need to produce accounts for all British species by the end of 2000 means that we can only hope to make draft accounts available to SRS members for a limited number of chosen species. Choosing these is difficult. Most rare species are relatively well-known and information is already available in Volume 3 of the Red Data Books and the Review of Nationally Notable spiders by Dr Peter Merrett. In many ways it is the more common species which present the greatest difficulty. What do we really know about their detailed distribution and ecology? In order to make our species accounts useful and reliable we need feedback from you. What do you know about the ecology of these species in your part of the country? Is the draft information correct, what can be added and what needs to be changed?

One provisional species account is given in this newsletter for the common species *Pisaura mirabilis* and it is planned to continue publishing provisional accounts in future issues. Most species accounts will be in the order of 100-150 words in length, but for RDB and certain other species longer accounts will be used. The use of county names in species accounts will refer to Watsonian vice county areas.

Please send your comments to the author of the profile. Craig Slawson has started the ball rolling with his distribution map and species account for a newly described species *Homo arachnophilus*. Please note that the format of this species account and the use of mainland Britain for the distribution map will not be the format used in the published maps.

***Homo arachnophilus* Slawson, 1999**



**Distribution and Status**

A widely distributed rare species, usually solitary, but occasionally migrating great distances to collect in groups of thirty or more in the spring. It can be found in almost any habitat, but it is thought to be parasitic on spiders.

Although known in this country and across the world for over four hundred years, it was only recognised as a distinct species in 1959, the type specimen being described from Flatford Mill, Suffolk.

*H. arachnophilus* is very hardy, being found throughout most countries in the world, although often in very low numbers..

**Habitat and Ecology**

This species is easily distinguished from the closely related *H. lepidopterophilus* by the stronger net attachment and the habit of burying its head in the vegetation. The plumage is very variable, including red beret, tweed jacket and an orange proboscis. The genitalia are not a useful identification feature and are therefore not illustrated.

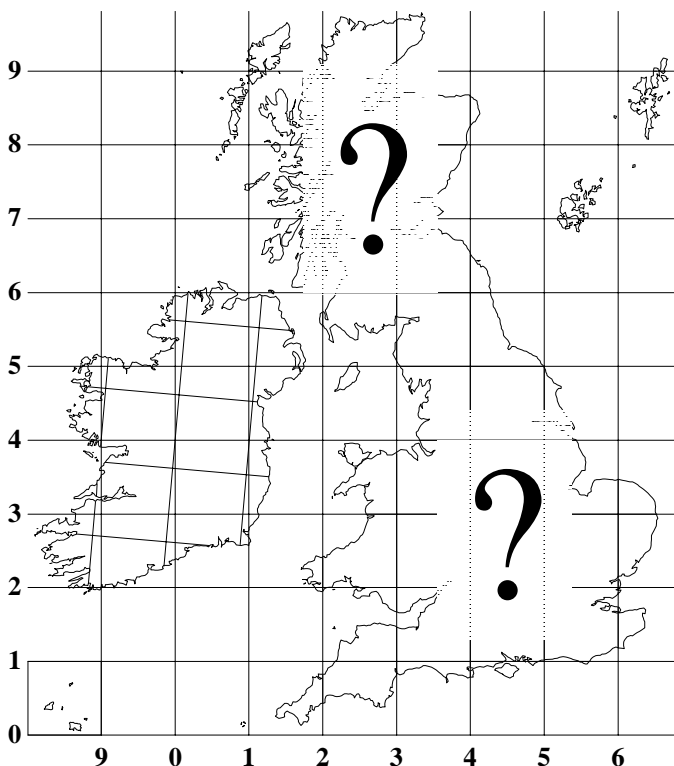
**Threats and Management**

The greatest threat to the species is a lack of young specimens. The majority of known locations hold mature specimens and there is an urgent need to artificially encourage a new younger generation to ensure the species' continued success.

**Author of profile:** Craig Slawson

Comments please to Craig Slawson at Heath House, 20 Queens's Road, Hartshill, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffs ST4 7LJ

***Pisaura mirabilis* (Clerck, 1757) the 'Nursery-web' spider**



**Distribution**

Widespread across Britain.

**Status**

Common

**Habitat and Ecology**

The species is found in a wide variety of habitats. Adults tend to occur in reasonably tall vegetation in habitats such as rough grassland, woodland rides, field edges, heathland, gardens and marsh edges. This is a ubiquitous spider, easily recognised even in early immature stages. The adult season extends from May to July. The male catches a fly or other prey item as a courtship 'gift' for the female during mating. The female carries the egg-cocoon in her chelicerae until the eggs are about to hatch, when she constructs a tent-like web in tall herbage in which young remain until they disperse.

**Author of profile** Peter Harvey using information from Bristow (1958), Jones (1983) and Locket & Millidge (1951).

Comments please to Peter Harvey at 32 Lodge Lane, Grays, Essex RM16 2YP

## *Zodarion italicum* (Canestrini, 1868)

### Distribution

First recorded from Grays in 1985 (Harvey & Murphy 1985), the centre of distribution in Britain is the East Thames Corridor in South Essex and West Kent. The species is also recorded from Stanway near Colchester in North Essex, Croxley Green in Hertfordshire, Middlesex and more recently (1998) Newhaven in West Sussex.

The species is known from France, Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Italy, Slovenia and Croatia, and the distribution map in Bosmans (1997) indicates the British records are within the natural range of the species in Europe. Populations may represent a survival from periods when Britain was joined to mainland Europe by a land bridge.

### Status

Listed as Naturalised in Recorder but current evidence suggests this is a native species and should be assigned a Nationally Scarce status.

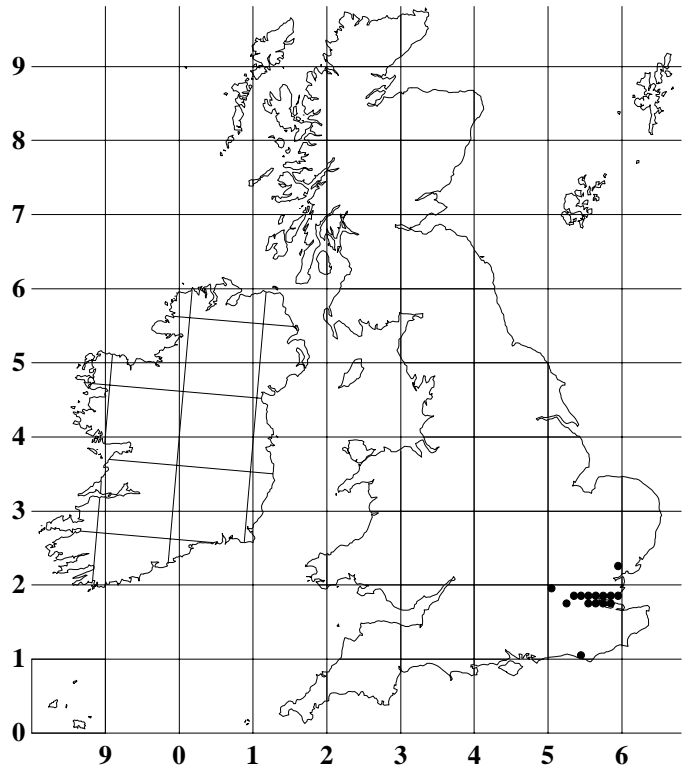
### Habitat and Ecology

The spider is strongly associated with dry, warm, sunny open habitats containing a proportion of bare ground. The species is widespread and common in suitable habitat in the East Thames Corridor where the climate is unique in Britain for its low rainfall, high summer temperatures and mild winters. Here the spider has been trapped in large numbers in the drier parts of grazing marsh grasslands, unimproved Thames Terrace grasslands and other open grassland sites. It is also found in old sand and chalk pits and other 'brown field' sites in the region where the substrate provides warm, dry, sunny and sparsely vegetated habitats. The Colchester and Hertfordshire localities are old railway sites with clinker and railway ballast and the Middlesex localities are adjacent to railway lines. The Newhaven record is from a shingle beach.

Records from derelict railway sidings and sites near railway lines have caused some arachnologists to suggest this spider is a recent arrival and that railways may play a part in the distribution of the spider. This view is rejected here on the basis of our current knowledge of its distribution and ecology in Britain and the European distribution.

The spider has been observed using the common black ant *Lasius niger* as prey but in captivity it will take the meadow ant *Lasius flavus* and other ant species are probably used. On hot days the spider appears to become more active in the early evening, possibly a response to slower ant activity.

Adults are mainly found during May and June but the species has a long season with adults being recorded through to September and October.



### Threats

The 'Thames Gateway' initiative threatens wildlife habitats in the whole East Thames Corridor. There is enormous development pressure on all open space in the region and 'brown field' sites are especially vulnerable.

Amenity management, the 'tidying up' of habitats and the political urge to plant virtually every open area with trees all represent threats to the nationally important biodiversity of thermophilic and xerophytic species found in the region.

### Management

Open sunny habitats need to be maintained by grazing or periodic control of scrub and tree invasion. Occasional disturbance to expose areas of bare ground is likely to be beneficial.

### References

- Bosmans, R. 1997 Revision of the genus *Zodarion* Walckenaer, 1833, part II. Western and central Europe, including Italy (Araneae: Zodariidae). *Bull. Br. Arachnol. Soc.* **10** (8), 265-294.
- Harvey, P. 1985 *Zodarion italicum* (Araneae:Zodariidae), a species newly recorded from Britain. *Newsl. Br. Arachnol. Soc.* **44**: 4.

**Author of profile** Peter Harvey.

Comments please to Peter Harvey at 32 Lodge Lane, Grays, Essex RM16 2YP

## *Philodromus longipalpis* Simon, 1870

### Distribution

The species was first collected in Britain at Box Hill in 1985 but remained unidentified until specimens were identified by Hendrik Segers.

The spider has been collected from widely scattered sites across southern England apparently only by David Carr and the author.

### Status

Not listed in Recorder but current evidence suggests this is a rare species.

### Habitat and Ecology

All adults have been beaten from the lower branches of old oak trees but juveniles have been taken from heather at Chobham Common in Surrey and from heather under open oak woodland in the Quantocks, South Somerset and kept in captivity until maturity. All records have been of singletons except for the recent collection of two females from one old pollard oak tree by the side of a footpath between wheat fields at Paglesham Churchend in South Essex. Adults have been collected from mid-May to mid-July.

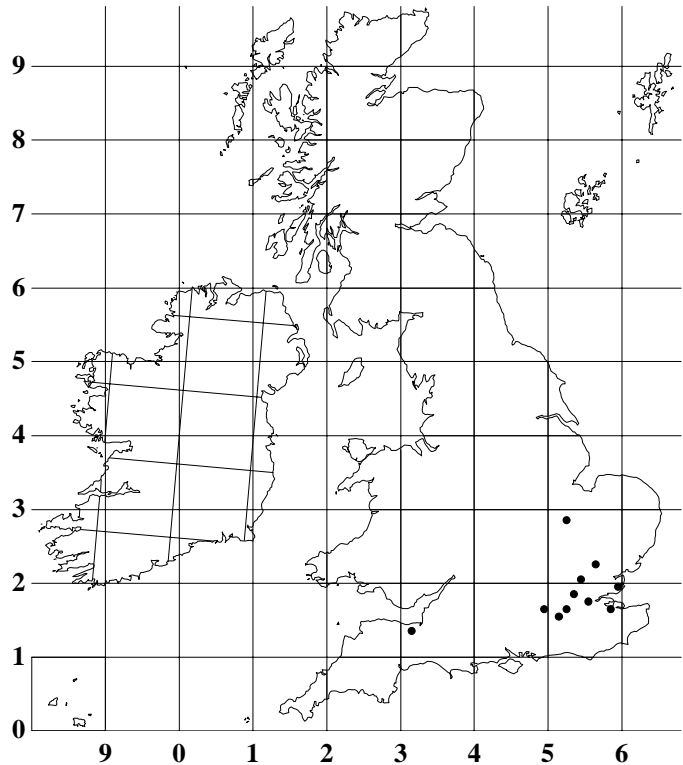
*P. longipalpis* is significantly larger than other species in the *aureolus* group and juveniles have a characteristic reddish coloration. Specimens which may be this species should be retained alive until mature. The difficulty of identification presented by this group means that all records must be confirmed with a voucher specimen.

### Threats

Current evidence points to a low population density and exacting habitat requirements. The loss of hedgerows with old oak trees and the closing in of open woodland are likely to threaten this species.

### Management

All records have been from mature oak trees in open habitats or as immatures from heathland in open



woodland habitat. Management to retain these open surroundings may be important.

### References

- Segers, H. 1992 Nomenclatural notes on, and redescriptions of some little-known species of the *Philodromus aureolus* group (Araneae: Philodromidae). Bull. Br. Arachnol. Soc. **9** (1), 19-25.

Author of profile P.R. Harvey

Comments please to Peter Harvey at 32 Lodge Lane, Grays, Essex RM16 2YP

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## WATCH OUT FOR *Argiope bruennichi*

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## A CALL FOR RECORDS .....

*Argiope* seems to be undergoing a dramatic expansion in its range and we should be searching for this species and trying to map its spread across Britain. Look especially in rough grassland which is left uncut during the summer and winter. It seems highly probable that the spider is now present in many suitable sites across southern England, perhaps even as far north as Derbyshire (see Stan Dobson's report of its occurrence in SRS Newsletter No. 26, November 1996).

In order to map the spread of *Argiope* in the Newsletter I need a minimum of ten km grid reference and year date data. Please send me your *Argiope* data and look for it in new areas.

Peter Harvey, 32 Lodge Lane, Grays, Essex RM16 2YP

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## ***Zodarion rubidum*, new to Britain**

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**Peter Harvey, 32 Lodge Lane, Grays, Essex RM16 2YP**

I have been working through spider pitfall trap material from many woodland sites in the Epping Forest area for ecologist Paul Mabbott. Earlier this year Paul sent me a tube collected in July 1997 from Temple Mills, Leyton in the London Borough of Waltham Forest, part of the Watsonian South Essex recording area. Looking through the contents I saw a *Zodarion* female and turning it over expected to find the East Thames Corridor speciality *Z. italicum*. To my surprise here was a different species. Reference to Bosmans' Revision of the genus *Zodarion*, part II in the BAS bulletin volume 10 (8) showed the likely candidate to be *Z. rubidum* or possibly *Z. fuscum*, already discovered in Britain by Martin Askins in Wiltshire. With his usual remarkable turnaround by return post Peter Merrett identified the specimens as *Z. rubidum*.

The material collected by Paul Mabbott contained a total of two female *Zodarion rubidum* and one immature together with two male *Xerolycosa nemoralis*, a scarce spider in Essex. The formerly extensive site consists of railway marshalling yards, mostly abandoned. The London Ecology Unit Handbook No. 11 *Nature Conservation in Waltham Forest* gives details of the history of the site. In 1840 the Northern & Eastern Railway opened from Stratford to Broxbourne along the Lea Valley, a siding being connected to one of the last of the several mills which had at various times stood on or near the site since at least the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Extensions to the sidings were made and the layout was modernised in the late 1950s, but decline in rail-freight caused closure for the marshalling yard and most tracks were lifted in the mid-1980s.

I have recently been able to visit the site and the spider is still present in some numbers. The habitat consists of ruderal vegetation and scrub largely developed on a substrate of old dry railway ballast which ranges in size from coarse stones to finer material. An adjacent grassland area turned up *Zodarion italicum* – this must be the first British locality known to hold two *Zodarion* species!

There is no public access to the site, where the construction of a new road is taking place. With the co-operation of the London Borough of Waltham Forest and the road contractors it seems probable that the spider will survive.

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## **Forthcoming Newsletters**

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I would like to include in a forthcoming Newsletter a report by Suzanne de Havilland on *Argiope* at allotments near Hastings, East Sussex where the Allotment Association have been studying the spider. We often know remarkably little about even common species and this is an excellent example of how everyone can help increase our knowledge of different species.

My thanks to those who have contributed notes and information for this issue. Newsletter No. 35 will be published in November 1999. Please send contributions as soon as possible to:

Peter Harvey, SRS National Organiser, 32 Lodge Lane, Grays, Essex, RM16 2YP  
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