

Spider Recording Scheme News

November 2010, No. 68

Editor: Peter Harvey; srs@britishspiders.org.uk

My thanks to those who have contributed to this issue. S.R.S. News No. 69 will be published in March 2011. Please send contributions by the end of January at the latest to Peter Harvey, 32 Lodge Lane, GRAYS, Essex, RM16 2YP; e-mail: srs@britishspiders.org.uk or grays@peterharvey.freemove.co.uk. The newsletter depends on your contributions!

Editorial

As always I am very grateful to the contributors who have provided articles for this issue. I make a plea to all recorders to write something on what you have been doing and what you have found in your spider recording.

Many thanks are due to those Area Organisers, MapMate users and other recorders who have provided their records to the scheme. Since the spring I have received MapMate records from Allan and Annette Binding, Robert Cumming, Mike Davidson, Dave Holloway, Alastair Lavery, Doug Marriott, Jennifer Newton, Ray Ruffell and Tony Russell-Smith, and these records include ones made by other recorders as well, to whom we are also very grateful. All these data have all been easily uploaded to the new SRS website using the software developed by Teknica Ltd for us. I am also grateful to Edward Milner for providing records he has made in VC18 (S. Essex) metropolitan London and to Dr Eric Duffey for records he has recently made at several sites in Norfolk. A special thanks are due to Ray Symonds for providing records from the Cecil Warburton Collection of spiders held at the University Museum of Zoology in Cambridge. The Museum has recently computerised its catalogue of spirit preserved invertebrates and published the records online, including the Warburton material. Ray has curated the Warburton Collection, checking determinations of the British material and updating the nomenclature so that it is compatible with the S.R.S.

As publicised in the July SRS News, the **Spider Recording Scheme website** is up and running and provides the absolutely latest maps for all British spiders and their associated summary autecological information. The website is open to anyone to register, upload images and contribute to the forum, species notes and add or edit information on sites of interest for spiders and other wildlife. This will allow us to build up a resource on sites which recorders know have spider interest.

Members of the BAS and the recording scheme can also interrogate the regional maps to access details of the records behind the tetrads and to view the locations using google maps.

Although planned for later anyway, work was undertaken at very short notice to put in place a facility for members of the public to register and record several 'easily recognisable spiders', supported by uploaded images. This was done in time for a BBC Autumnwatch programme broadcast on 14th October which was to feature raft spiders (*Dolomedes* spp.), 4 spot orb-weavers (*Araneus quadratus*) and wasp spiders (*Argiope bruennichi*).

More developments are planned and many more are possible - please make suggestions for improvements either directly to myself or through the website contact facility.

Islandiana falsifica (Keyserling, 1886), Linyphiidae. New to Wales... and the rest of Britain

by Mike Davidson

During a British Myriapod and Isopod Group outing to North Wales in April 2010, I visited a rather bleak salt-marsh at Point of Ayr (SJ1284) near Prestatyn. The invertebrate catch was very poor, but in addition to a pill woodlouse and centipede, one small female linyphiid was retrieved from below a large embedded boulder near the sea wall. The spider defied identification by me (and Peter Harvey) but Peter Merrett, as always, came up with the goods. This was *Islandiana falsifica*, recorded from Sweden, Finland, Siberia, Canada and Alaska. Its apparent absence from Iceland hasn't prevented speculation, in some quarters, that it arrived in Wales with the volcanic dust!

Marusik (2004), in a study of petrophilous spiders, describes it as being found on pebbly beaches and scree. This doesn't quite fit the Point of Ayr site but widens the options for finding further specimens on the north Wales coast, if you fancy a seaside holiday.

Of course it now needs a suitable common name to commemorate it and your suggestions are sought. Bearing in mind the implication in its specific name and its generic connection with Iceland, I thought "The Iceland Bank Money Spider" would fit the bill. I doubt if we would get any sponsorship from them though.

A more considered paper, featuring Peter Merrett's drawings of the epigyne, will appear in due course.

My thanks to Peter Harvey and Peter Merrett for their assistance in identifying this species.

References

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***Theridion blackwalli* O. P.-Cambridge, 1871, (Araneae: Theridiidae) – new to South-east Yorkshire [VC61]**

by Joe Ostojá-Starzewski

Over the last twenty odd years I have been involved professionally in the identification of various invertebrates but specialising on mites (Acari), however, other members of the Arachnida, and in particular spiders have increasingly featured in my work and have drawn my interest. In late May 2010 I eventually joined the British Arachnological Society (BAS), a prospect that I have pondered over for some years because of other commitments, so I guess it was with the heightened awareness of a new BAS member that on the 14.vi.2010 I noticed and collected an unfamiliar looking spider from the inside of my bathroom window (SE791648).

Based on the description provided in Jones (1983) and Roberts (1995) I provisionally identified the specimen as a female *Theridion blackwalli* O. P. - Cambridge, 1871. As a relative novice to the business of identifying British spiders I contacted Peter Harvey who kindly agreed to take a look at the specimen for me, confirming my identification. Peter further stated that the specimen is ‘a very gravid female with a plugged epigyne, much larger than usual for the species because of this’.

The current distribution map for *T. blackwalli* shows that most records of this species are south and east of a line connecting Gloucester in the south-west and Goole in the north-east, with a few additional records in the counties along the Welsh border. The most northerly record is in England, near Durham and dates to before 1900. My find represents a first record for South-east Yorkshire [VC 61] and is the second most northerly find to date. I have retained this specimen Ref. No. 002.06.2010 in my own personal collection.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Peter Harvey for his help in confirming my identification.

References

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How did *Midia midas* get its name?

by Tony Russell-Smith

The species we now know as *Midia midas* (Simon, 1884) was described by the great French arachnologist Eugène Simon under the name *Lepthyphantes midas* from a single female collected in the Fontainebleau Forest near Paris.

The most obvious characteristic of this small linyphiid spider, which in somatic morphology does indeed resemble a *Lepthyphantes* species, is the enormous scape-like protuberance from the epigyne of the female (Fig. 1). Much more recently, the late Michael Saaristo revised this species, concluding that it was not at all closely related to *Lepthyphantes minutus* (the type species of the genus) and creating the new, monotypic genus *Midia* to encompass it (Saaristo, 1995). One reason that Saaristo excluded *M. midas* from *Lepthyphantes* sensu stricto was that the protrusion from the epigyne is not an S-shaped scape such as is found *Lepthyphantes* and many related genera, but rather a posteriorly directed outgrowth of the anterior margin of the epigynal cavity.

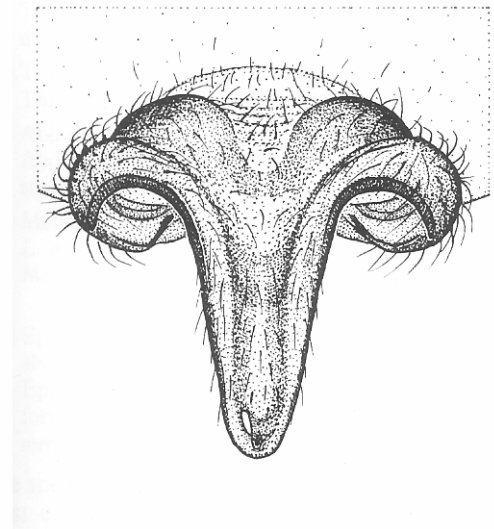


Figure 1. Epigyne of *Midia midas* (Simon, 1884) in ventral view (©Michael Roberts).

Why did Simon apply the specific name “*midas*” to this rare and interesting species? Most readers will have heard of the legendary king Midas and of the gift of being able to turn all that he touched to gold, granted to him by the god Bacchus, the so-called “Midas touch”. What may be less familiar to a modern audience is the continuation of the myth, as related by Ovid in his *Metamorphosis*. According to this account, Midas ordered a celebratory feast to be placed before him on his return home from his encounter with Bacchus, but was horrified to find that even the food he touched turned to gold as he tried to swallow it. Midas understood that this “gift” was in fact a curse and prayed to Bacchus to be delivered from starvation, a prayer that the god granted. Rejecting power and splendour, he retired to the country where he became a worshipper of Pan, the god of music. Subsequently, Pan challenged Apollo, the god of the lyre, to a contest of musical skill. Pan played his pipes and gave great pleasure both to himself and to Midas, his follower. Then Apollo struck up his lyre and was immediately awarded the prize by Tmolus, god of the mountains. All present agreed with this decision except Midas, who questioned its justice. Apollo declared that Midas’ ears were deprived and immediately turned them to the ears of a Donkey.

Simon was, in common with many of his generation, well versed in the classics and could read and write both Latin and Greek. Perhaps because this was the case, he rarely provided a derivation for the scientific names he

created, as is normally the case today. However, he would quite certainly have been familiar with Ovid's *Metamorphosis* and would have known the myth of king Midas. It seems quite possible that Simon decided that the epigyne of *Midia* resembled a donkey's ear and that this is how it gained its name.

An alternative, perhaps slightly less likely, explanation derives from the origin of Midas in Phrygia, now part of Anatolia, central Turkey. The Phrygians of the 8th century BC had a distinctive type of bronze war helmet (Fig. 2) which would undoubtedly have been worn by a warrior king such as Midas. The form of this helmet does bear a general resemblance to that of the epigyne of *M. midas*. The example illustrated here is in the collections of the British Museum in London, but there is an almost identical helmet in the collections of the Louvre in Paris. Simon had an office in the Museum National d'Histoire Naturelle near the Jardins des Plantes which is less than a kilometre from the Louvre. He could well have seen this helmet on display in the Louvre and made the association with the Phrygian king in this way.



Figure 2. A bronze helmet from the kingdom of Uratu, in Anatolia in the collections of the British Museum. 8th-9th century BC.

Clearly, unless some information turns up in Simon's papers, we will never know what was in his mind when naming this species and the suggestions put forward here are inevitably speculative. Recently, the vernacular name "Midas tree weaver" has been proposed for *Midia*. While the second part of the name is reasonably explanatory, those unfamiliar with its Latin name might be forgiven for being slightly puzzled. Should we take a leaf from the book of those 19th century lepidopterists who coined such

striking vernacular names for moths as the "Chimney Sweep", the "Confused" and the "Large Ear"? It has to be admitted that the "Asses Ear" or even the "Anatolian Helmet" do have a certain ring about them, even at the risk of leaving the reader even more confused!

Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to Michael Roberts for allowing me to reproduce the excellent figure of the epigyne of *Midia midas* taken from his "Spiders of Great Britain and Ireland". I also acknowledge the Trustees of the British Museum for allowing me to reproduce the illustration of the helmet in Figure 2.

References

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Araneus alsine in Glen Moriston, Inverness-shire 2010

by Jane Bowman

Having found *Philodromus margaritatus* in Glen Moriston during 2008 and then on my local stomping ground of Dundreggan Estate in 2009 I thought my exciting 'spider experiences' would be over. However during an official Spider Survey of the Estate during the summer of 2009 carried out by Alastair Lavery, a female *Araneus alsine* was discovered.

Feeling envious that I hadn't seen such a beautiful creature, my aim this summer was to find the spider for myself. Knowing very little about the spider other than it preferred damp, woodland clearings, I started searching on July 9th in a clearing of approx quarter of an acre, on the 10,000acre Estate with its ancient birch woodland. I found a couple of wandering male spiders which I thought looked very promising. An identification was not possible via a photograph, so rather reluctantly sent a specimen to Peter Harvey who confirmed *Araneus alsine* (see Fig. 1).

Returning to the same location a week later to hopefully find a female, I spotted another wandering male which I tracked!! Within a couple of metres he stopped and began swaying from side to side. About 15cm away amongst the *Molinia caerulea* was a leaf, shaped into a cone, from which a female *Araneus alsine* emerged (see Fig. 2). I was delighted; she was so strikingly marked and well deserving of her English name Strawberry Spider or Orange Wheelweaving Spider. I watched entranced for an hour as the male lurked under the female's leaf cone retreat keeping a distance of 10-15cm. She periodically emerged, darted down to within a couple of centimetres of him, but seemed disinterested in his swaying tactics. I felt she'd have preferred a meal!! After a few investigations she then emerged and began to gather up some of her web, which was virtually invisible, rolled into a tight ball (see



Figure 1. Male *Araneus alsine* ©Jane Bowman



Figure 2. Female *Araneus alsine* emerging from a leaf, shaped into a cone ©Jane Bowman

Fig. 3) and disappeared back with the ‘ball’ into her retreat. Entertainment over, for both the male *Araneus alsine* and myself! This was my last sighting of any males until the end of summer.

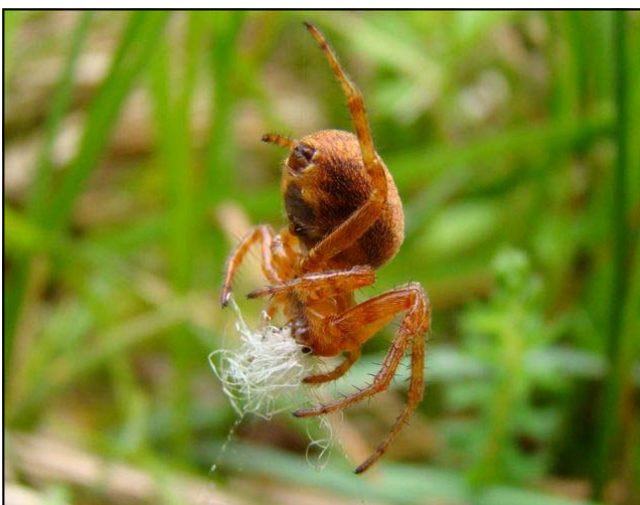


Figure 3. Female *Araneus alsine* rolling web into ball ©Jane Bowman

Searching around I found eight more of these leaf retreats, each with a female *Araneus alsine* inside, seen by gently turning the cone through 90 degrees so as to not to disturb the web. Each retreat was made of one, occasionally two dried birch leaves, curled into a cone shape and held together with silk. These were nearly all found suspended from *Molinia caerulea* leaves about 15-20cm from the ground. However a couple of spiders had used bog myrtle, *Myrica gale* leaves, within the plant, which were more difficult to spot (see Fig. 4).



Figure 4. *Araneus alsine* with bog myrtle leaf retreat ©Jane Bowman

No retreat was found directly under a tree’s canopy but within roughly a 25m radius of a tree or trees; sunshine for at least part of the day seemed favoured. The ground was damp, but not waterlogged, abundant *Molinia caerulea* growing with bog myrtle, *Myrica gale*, orchids and other wet meadow flowers.



Figure 5. *Araneus alsine* habitat ©Jane Bowman

The spiders were found at many similar clearings within the wood (see Fig. 5), though small clearings (less than 25sq.m.) which appeared to be deprived of sunlight, produced no *A. alsine*. The damp meadow land at the wood’s periphery had on average five females per quarter

acre. The top of the tree line at 300m where there are young birch saplings, juniper, lush *Molinia caerulea* as well as moorland vegetation also produced good numbers of *Araneus alsine*. An isolated pocket of woodland above 300m also produced three female retreats (see Fig. 6).



Figure 6. An isolated pocket of woodland above 300m with *Araneus alsine* ©Jane Bowman

Feeling confident at recognising these distinctive leaf cone retreats with their spectacularly coloured occupants, I searched other locations within Glen Moriston, finding the spiders in similar habitats. Unfortunately many open spaces particularly to the east of the glen have bracken cover and whilst the spiders seem to tolerate light bracken cover at the edge of wet flushes they were not to be found amongst the dense, tall bracken. Particularly in Glen Garry, south of Glen Moriston the birch woods are engulfed by scrub and bracken, and I found no *A. alsine* and none in the damp meadows at the periphery of the woods.

However, travelling north of Glen Moriston and passing a location which appeared to have similar habitats to Dundreggan Estate, I searched a large clearing at the edge of a lochan and within ten minutes had located a female in her retreat enjoying a meal (see Fig. 7).



Figure 7. *Araneus alsine* female with prey ©Jane Bowman

I watched very contentedly as a cleg, a particularly unpleasant 'enemy' of humans, flew into her web unaware that it was to be her next meal!! The webs suspended beneath the leaf retreat and just above the ground, are extremely difficult to spot except after dew or rain.

During September whilst searching the same locations on Dundreggan Estate that I'd visited throughout the summer, I found many of the retreats, which by this time I was finding relatively easy to spot, were occupied by young spiders and less mature females. One amazing area of 2sq.m. had a total of 14 leaf cone retreats; twelve of which were youngsters and two female adults. The youngsters are considerably more elusive tucked up high in the cone's point, and if encouraged out they would dart into the depths of the undergrowth, unlike the adults which if disturbed would 'freeze' on a strand of web presenting either ventral or lateral postures and not the more photogenic dorsal view - how very un-female!

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***Tetragnatha* spider feeding behaviour observed at a site near to Greenholme in Cumbria in early July, 2010**

by Paul and Judy Dunford

The specimen shown in the photograph (see Fig. 1) was seen by Judy to drop from its web on a line to the surface of the water in the ditch and run directly across the surface to capture a small fly that had landed on the water immediately beforehand.



Figure 1. *Tetragnatha* with prey ©Paul Dunford

The ripples from its contact with the water surface were observed, and the capture happened very quickly. The spider then returned to its web to eat the fly. After many attempts, and then only by misting the web and almost lying in the ditch I was able to achieve only a poor quality photograph from below of the spider on its web (see Fig. 2).

The web, as can be seen, is inclined to the vertical and hanging over the water. Judy was able to obtain a better photograph from above the web. (She was actually trying to photograph a butterfly at the time and I was looking to photograph spiders.) This behaviour raises interesting questions about how the spider sensed its prey.



Figure 2. *Tetragnatha* spider on its web
©Paul Dunford

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HARVESTMEN NEWS

A call to armature and legs, an ORS Update

Peter Nicholson, National Recorder ORS

As many of you know Teknica Ltd, in conjunction with Peter Harvey on behalf of BAS, have produced the SRS website (<http://srs.britishspiders.org.uk/>). Software allows the easy uploading of MapMate records onto the website, which allows recorders to see their efforts much more quickly reflected in the website. Knowing that what you see on the distribution maps is up-to-date will hopefully stimulate more recording and a better understanding of our species.

This software is also available for use by the Opiliones Recording Scheme and will have the same potential for promoting harvestmen, with all the spin-offs of photos, distribution maps and background information as for the Spider Recording Scheme. It will however require support from all recorders to submit content. Over this winter I hope to put together what I have, into reflecting harvestmen and their recording. It will take time and it will require volunteers to take on various aspects of the site. All this will be discussed at a later date.

I now ask you to start collating your records and to go out and record in the time left this year, taking photographs if possible. I will now start accepting records for input to the ORS (MapMate cuk 5cr). I must impress on those who don't send in records in MapMate format that their records will take considerably longer to process. If you are willing and able to convert your own records onto MapMate, please do so. If not please send them to me and I will endeavor to put them on the database as soon as I can. A suitable Excel template will be available for download from the new harvestmen website when that is up and running.

As a rider to all this, much background work is required to get both the database and website up and running. This entails, apart from my time, working with others whose time is limited and all voluntary, so please bear with us.

My address is likely to change in the coming months so please look under the Area Organiser contacts on the BAS website (you will need to be logged-on as a member to do this). This will enable me to change address at a suitable time with less confusion.

Platybunus pinetorum: a new Harvestman (Opiliones) to Britain

by Paul Richards

British records:

4.6.2010	Crookes, Sheffield	SK32425 87442	female
6.6.2010	"	SK3242 8744	"
20.6.2010	"	SK3242 8744	"

Specimens are located in the Natural History Collections

of Museums Sheffield and The University of Mainz (Collection Axel Schoenhofer CAS949), Germany.

Three female specimens of a new species of harvestman to Britain were found in Sheffield in June 2010. Translations of Martens (1978) and Wijnhoven (2009) were used to determine this very distinctive species. It was confirmed by Axel Schoenhofer at Mainz University, Germany. The following description is based on a combination of observations from the Sheffield specimens and the translated keys. Large, dark harvestmen found in spring are likely to be this species.

Length: 5-9mm

Length of second leg: 34 - 41mm

Occurrence: Adults from end of March to end of June (Very early for a species of this size)

Habitat: In Holland found in wet deciduous wood on clay and mixed woodland with, among others, larch, oak, birch and pine with bilberry undergrowth. (Wijnhoven,2009)

Behaviour: Adults on tree trunks and shrub stems or in litter among stones. Younger stages in litter and low herbs. Not found by sweeping, but disturbed from high in Privet (*Ligustrum*) hedge during severe pruning, where it is probably resting deep within the hedge.

Moves little when disturbed. In captivity often sits motionless, flat on soil surface where it is very well camouflaged.

Recognition: Robust with medium to long legs. The russet coloured ocularium is much wider than long and deeply undermined both in the middle and at the front. It carries two rows of 7-9 black tipped pale denticles. Eyes are black rimmed. Teeth on femur of the palp longer than the cross-section of the femur. Large apophyses internal of the palpal patella and tarsus.

Male - Adults nearly black with pale brown legs. Trochanters and palps glossy black. Saddle marking is unclear. The apophyses on the palpal patella and femur are more pointed and obvious than in the female. Immatures are paler and resemble *Platybunus triangularis*. No male specimens found in Britain as yet. It is known to be partially parthenogenetic in other parts of Europe so it is possible that males may prove to be absent from Britain.

Female - Dark, mottled brown body with white edged cephalothorax with black patches. The darker saddle is outlined with white, particularly just behind the ocularium. Trochanters are white with a pattern of fine black lines. Palpal femur with distinctive long, evenly spaced, white spines. These are opposed by a large and small spine on the palpal tarsus.

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http://www.spiderling.de/arages/Fotogalerie/Galerie_Platybunus.htm

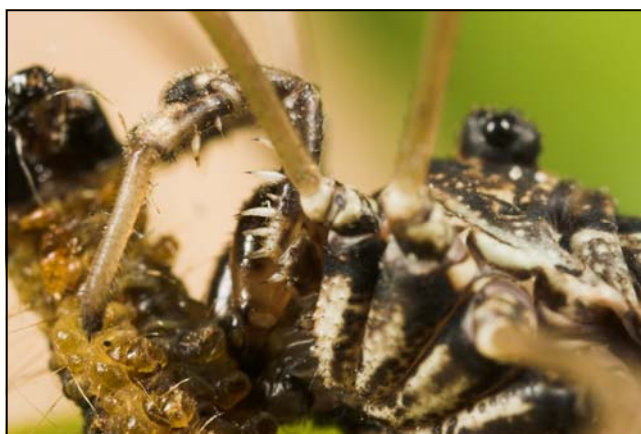
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Platybunus pinetorum female, Sheffield, 4.6.2010
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Platybunus pinetorum female Sheffield, 21.6.2010
© J.P.Richards www.invertebrate-images.co.uk



Platybunus pinetorum female, Sheffield, 4.6.2010
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Platybunus pinetorum female, Sheffield, 4.6.2010

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Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Axel Schoenhofer for confirming the identification of the specimens for me and to Aloys Staudt for allowing me to use his fine picture of the male.

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Platybunus pinetorum male, Wald zw. Dirmingen u. Eppelborn/SL, 8. Juni 2009. Photo: Aloys Staudt

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