Habitat

The Common Zebra spider is widespread around houses and other buildings where it hunts on walls, fences, rockeries and similar places during the day. It is particularly noticeable on vertical surfaces warmed by direct sunlight where its jerky movements often betray it. Crisscross lines of silk over the substrate are another clue to its presence. At night and in dull weather it retreats into a silken cell, built in a hole or crevice. It can, however, be found away from the built environment on fence posts, rocks and the bark of trees.

Related species

Two related species, *Salticus cingulatus* and *Salticus zebraneus*, are quite similar in appearance, and are also generally known as Zebra spiders, but they usually occupy rather different habitats. The former tends to be confined to the trunks of trees (occasionally on fence posts), and the latter to conifer trees, and tall plants and bushes. While *Salticus cingulatus* is widespread in Britain, *Salticus zebraneus* is virtually confined to the Thames corridor.

The Common Zebra spider is by far the commonest jumping spider associated with human habitation. Two other jumping spider species, *Sitticus pubescens* and *Pseudeuophrys lanigera*, are found in similar habitats but neither of them has the distinctive black and white striping of the Zebra spider. They are also smaller and much less common.

Geoff Oxford

Based on Spider Recording Scheme data 2017

Where are they?

The Common Zebra spider is found throughout England but less frequently in Wales and Scotland. Its preference for buildings may explain why it is less often recorded from the uplands of central Wales, the northern Pennines and large parts of Scotland.

For more information

britishspiders.org.uk/srs_salticus_scenicus
britishspiders.org.uk/srs_salticus_cingulatus
britishspiders.org.uk/srs_salticus_zebraneus
Bee, L., Oxford, G. & Smith, H. (2017) *Britain's Spiders.* Princeton WILDGuides.

The British Arachnological Society

The BAS is Britain's only charity devoted exclusively to spiders and their relatives. We use science and education to advance the wider understanding and appreciation of arachnids, and to promote their conservation.

Find us at: **www.britishspiders.org.uk**, **www.facebook.com/BritishSpiders** or on Twitter **@BritishSpiders**

Factsheet text by Lawrence Bee, Geoff Oxford and Helen Smith, edited by Nicky Rowbottom, designed by Colin Edwards Graphic Design

FACT SHEET
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Common Zebra spider

(Salticus scenicus)

British Arachnological Society

Advancing Arachnology

Nik Hunt

A face-full of eyes (female)

This is one of the commonest jumping spiders in Britain and can often be spotted hunting on garden walls and fences on warm sunny days.

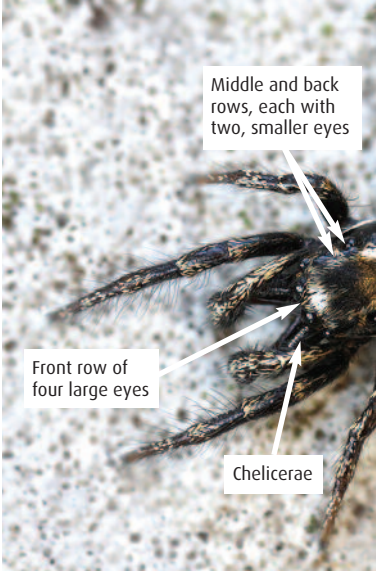
How to recognise a Common Zebra spider

Both sexes of this small jumping spider have a distinctive appearance of white markings on a dark brown to black background. Often the white patches meet and form bands across the whole abdomen resulting in a pattern of contrasting stripes, giving the spider its common name of Zebra spider. The dark and white coloration is produced by flattened scales (rather like those on butterfly wings), which in bright sunshine can appear iridescent. Very occasionally an all-black (melanic) variety with no white markings has been recorded in industrially polluted areas. Even as juveniles, these spiders can easily be recognised by their characteristic black and white markings.

In common with other jumping spiders the cephalothorax (front section of the body) is distinctively square-fronted and the face is almost entirely occupied by a row of four eyes – all are large, the central pair particularly so. Two more pairs of much smaller eyes are set further back. The male has very conspicuously elongated chelicerae (jaws). As well as being used in courtship (see below), these are often used in fights with rival males.

Tone Killick

Alert posture of female showing the black and white scales



Michael Schaefer

Catching prey

Common Zebra spiders do not spin a web to catch prey and are most commonly seen actively hunting on sunny surfaces. The spider usually sits motionless until the movement of potential prey is detected by the two pairs of small eyes on each side of the cephalothorax. The spider then turns to face its prey and moves jerkily forwards or backwards. It uses the four large eyes at the front of the head to judge distance accurately, before leaping onto its prey. These

FACT FILE

Common Zebra spider

(Salticus scenicus)

Body length: males, 5–6 mm; females, 5–7 mm.

Colour: generally black or dark brown with white markings.

- Cephalothorax (front section of body) – dark with white markings and a white rim. In females, the white can form an X-shaped pattern
- Abdomen (back section) – dark with four to five distinct white side bars which may meet in the midline
- Legs – fairly short and robust. In males almost uniformly dark brown to black, in females lighter with dark mottling.

Habitat: common in built up areas and frequently seen during the day on the walls of buildings, fences and other surfaces warmed by direct sunlight.

Prey-catching webs: NONE – these spiders actively hunt their prey.

What's in a name?

- *salticus* comes from Latin and means 'dancing' or 'jumping', referring to its hunting behaviour
- *scenicus* translates from Greek to mean 'theatrical' or 'scenic' and refers to the striking black and white, zebra-like pattern.

eyes, which perceive colour, allow high resolution binocular vision and fine focussing.

Zebra spiders can be tempted to jump by presenting them with a fly or other small insect held in a pair of fine forceps. Attempts at close-up photography often end up with the spider leaping onto the camera. Before jumping, the spider attaches to the substrate a line of silk, which is paid out as it launches itself forwards. Should the leap be unsuccessful the spider simply uses its 'safety line' to clamber back to its starting point, having completed the spider version of a 'bungee' jump! Any insect or other spider that comes near enough, provided it is not too large to be overpowered, is fair game. This tiny spider can jump up to 10 cm and take prey several times its own size.

Martin Cooper

Male showing elongated chelicerae

Evan Jones

Female

Life history

Adult males are usually found from April to July, and females from March to October. Mating usually occurs in late spring or early summer. During courtship the male performs a jerky, zig–zagging dance in front of the female, extending and waving his forelegs and unwieldy chelicerae to grab her attention. After mating, the female retires to a sheltered site under stones or debris to spin a tangled retreat in which she will lay between 15 and 25 eggs protected within a silk egg-sac. The female guards the eggs until they hatch three or four weeks later. She cares for the hatched spiderlings (baby spiders) until they moult, and then abandons them to make their own way in the world. Between emerging from the egg-sac and reaching adulthood, the growing spiders shed their skins (moult) up to 9 or 10 times. After their penultimate moult they overwinter as sub-adults, becoming adult the following spring.

Female with (large) prey

Adam Opiola