

Spider Recording Scheme News

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SRS website: <http://srs.britishspiders.org.uk>

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Editorial

Please help future issues by providing articles, short or longer, on interesting discoveries and observations. The newsletter depends on your contributions!

Philodromus buxi continues to turn up in South Essex and the Lee Valley, with records from new sites in Barking & Dagenham and the Middlesex side of the Lee Valley at Tottenham. The species seems quite variable in outward appearance (see figures 1 & 2) and can be confused in the field with the superficially similar-looking *Philodromus margaritatus*, *P. emarginatus* and even some examples of the very variable *P. cespitum*. As with all *P. aureolus* group species, identification should be confirmed by microscopical examination of adults. There is also still the possibility of other European members of the *aureolus* group and new currently unrecognised species turning up in Britain.



Fig.1. *Philodromus buxi* female from the Lee Valley. Photograph © Peter Harvey



Fig. 2. *Philodromus buxi* female from Barking & Dagenham. Photograph © Peter Harvey

Arctosa perita on lowland peat habitats in Ireland

by Adam Mantell

I read Richard Burkmar's note in the Spring 2018 newsletter which discussed *Arctosa perita* on degraded lowland peat habitat in NW England with interest. Purely coincidentally, a few days afterwards a photo appeared on the Invertebrates Ireland Facebook group which I identified as a dark-coloured *Arctosa perita* on degraded lowland peat in Co. Offally, Ireland. Whilst I am familiar with this species from sand dune systems I have not encountered this species away from sandy coastal habitats on this side of the water. However, after an email exchange with Myles Nolan I understand that a number of records have been made of this species from dry, oxidising lowland peatlands similar to the setting described by Richard.

It seems that *Arctosa perita* could be used as an indicator of damaged peatland habitats, and given the abundance of damaged peatlands in Ireland may possibly be more common in that context here than in Britain.

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Cryptachaea blattea: an explosive expansion or an overlooked habitat?

by Tylan Berry

Back in March 2017, I collected a small female theridiid from underneath a discarded piece of UPVC that was lying on my garden lawn in St Austell, Cornwall. It had the typical teardrop shaped abdomen of the *Achaearenea* species so initially I put it down to an immature *A. lunata* or *simulans*. After a month of searching the garden I had located more of the same spider in very similar habitats: Discarded wooden furniture, children's garden play equipment, under plastic piping and always low to the ground. With the spiders maturing, I was baffled as they didn't seem your typical *Achaearenea* species. The patterning and colours weren't the same, the unusual habitat was wrong and I noticed a small tubercle posteriorly on the abdomen. After a bit of reading, I came across *Cryptachaea blattea*, which seemed to fit, but with only four current UK records of single spiders I doubted that I had an established population of this species living in my garden. In seeking advice, I got in touch with Matt

Prince, who had found the spider in Devon in 2014. He was confident of my ID and requested a specimen to verify the find. Within a week Matt had confirmed the identification and I was absolutely ecstatic. Not only had I found them in my garden, but I had found populations in two other nearby gardens!

They seem to be largely synanthropic, building a small, scruffy theridiid tangle web, usually covered in debris, low to the ground in tight, shaded spaces. In my findings, garden furniture, particularly plastic, seems to be a favoured choice: tables and chairs, children's slides/watertables/playhouses etc. I have also found them in holes in walls, under the lips of plant pots, under the cross beams of fences and even underneath a watering can that has been left outside!



Fig. 1. *Cryptachaea blattea* in web under plastic bin lid. Photograph © Tylan Berry



Fig. 2. *C. blattea* in web under plastic recycling bin. Photograph © Tylan Berry

Like its close relative, *Achaearanea* (*Cryptachaea*) *riparia*, *C. blattea* constructs a retreat that it usually hangs in the centre of its web, although its construction is slightly different. Whereas *A. riparia* creates a long, hollow retreat from particles of sand/soil that it sits inside, *C. blattea* constructs a small, scruffy retreat out of whatever detritus is to hand. Rather than residing inside the retreat, *C. blattea* prefer to rely on their cryptic abdominal pattern as camouflage and sit against the side or behind their construct. Unlike most theridiids that will drop out of their retreat at the slightest disturbance, *C. blattea* will cling on, hoping that they go unnoticed. This



Fig. 3. *Cryptachaea blattea* retreat under upturned kayak. Photograph © Tylan Berry



Fig. 4. *Cryptachaea blattea* in retreat. Photograph © Tylan Berry



Fig. 5. *Cryptachaea blattea* web and retreat in wall. Photograph © Tylan Berry

coupled with the messy, almost discarded looking web, can make them very easy to overlook. From April to July, most female webs will contain a number of egg sacs (between one and four) and these are covered in detritus by the female and incorporated into the retreat.

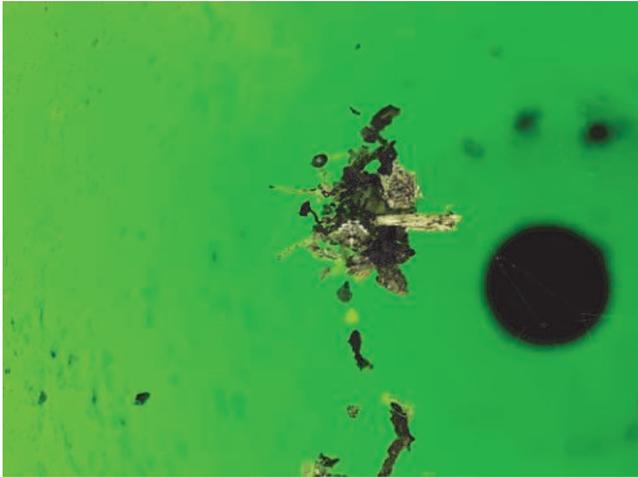


Fig. 6. *Cryptachaea blattea* retreat with egg sac under water table. Photograph © Tylan Berry

Prey mainly consists of crawling insects, especially ants, but typically of the Theridiidae, almost anything is taken. I have seen them feed on beetles, all sorts of flying insects, various isopods, caterpillars and even other, larger species of spider. Their prevalence in gardens may be connected to populations of the black garden ant, *Lasius niger*, as these have always been present in good numbers where I have found *C. blattea* and seem to be a consistent food source.

Fast forward to 2019, not only have I had the pleasure of getting to know the intimacies of this fascinating little spider, I have also had huge success in locating it in gardens further afield, not only Cornwall but also along the South Wales coast. New records are popping up in previous South West locations (Matt Prince) and the North Wales and Liverpool areas (Richard Gallon, Steve McWilliams, Chris Felton). I am really hopeful to see some inland records in the near future.

Are these small theridiids undertaking a huge explosion in their range and population all of a sudden, or has the strange habitat preference and difficult to decipher web caused us to overlook them all this time? I'm not sure of the answer, but once people start specifically searching for them in their gardens and double check those tired looking, messy webs, I am confident that we will see records increase dramatically and I eagerly await the results.

References

- Gallon, R. 2019. *Cryptachaea blattea* (Urqhart, 1866) recorded for the first time in north Wales. SRS News No. 93. In *Newsl. Br. Arachnol. Soc.* 144: 33.
SRS summary for *Cryptachaea blattea* (Araneae).
<http://srs.britishspiders.org.uk/portal.php/p/Summary/s/Cryptachaea+blattea>

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Fig. 7. *Cryptachaea blattea* with *Amaurobius* sp. prey. Photograph © Tylan Berry

Heliophanus dampfi Schenkel, 1923 (Salticidae) new to Dumfries & Galloway and Cumbria

by Bob Merritt

On 27 May 2019 I collected a single male *Heliophanus dampfi* (currently designated 'Vulnerable' using IUCN criteria) at Carsegowan Moss SSSI, Dumfries and Galloway. The site is an estuarine raised bog, elevation 12 metres AOD, situated between Newton Stewart and Wigtown. The spider was collected at NX424590, close to the edge of the SSSI, by sweeping low vegetation including Heather *Calluna vulgaris*, Purple Moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*, Harestail Cotton-grass *Eriophorum vaginatum*, Bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* and Downy Birch saplings *Betula pubescens*.

On 5 June 2019 I collected a single female *H. dampfi* at Scaleby Moss SSSI, a raised bog, elevation 35 metres AOD, near Carlisle, Cumbria. The spider was collected at NY429633 by sweeping low vegetation comprising the same species as listed previously for Carsegowan Moss.

These two records neatly fill the gap in the known UK distribution between Stirlingshire and South Lancashire.

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Hilaira nubigena Hull 1911 and other scarce spiders from an upland site in Dumfries and Galloway

by Bob Merritt

On 16 May 2019 I set 13 pitfall traps at the flat summit of Moorbrock Hill (figure 1) in the Glenkens area of Dumfries and Galloway at an elevation of between 630 and 643 metres AOD. The vegetation mostly comprised various mosses, Harestail Cotton-grass *Eriophorum vaginatum* and Bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus* and relatives. I returned on 7 June and removed the traps. Three of the traps were discarded or lost.

A total of 208 adult spiders was collected, comprising 37 species. The most notable discovery was that of *Hilaira nubigena*. This species has been recorded to date from only 25 UK hectads, all from the northern Pennines and Scotland, and is currently designated 'Vulnerable' using IUCN criteria. A further eight species possess the British rarity status of Nationally Scarce (*H. nubigena* is Nationally Rare).

The name, gender and number of specimens of these nine species is as follows:

Diplocentria bidentata: 19m, 11f.
Hilaira nubigena: 1f.
Latithorax faustus: 1m.
Mecynargus morulus: 1m.
Meioneta mossica: 1m.
Oreonetides vaginatus: 3m.
Oryphantes angulatus: 1m, 1f.
Scotinotylus evansi: 1m, 1f.
Walckenaeria clavicornis: 23m, 3f.

There is little doubt that further study of the upland areas of Dumfries and Galloway, and elsewhere, will reveal that some of these species are not as scarce as their national designations suggest.

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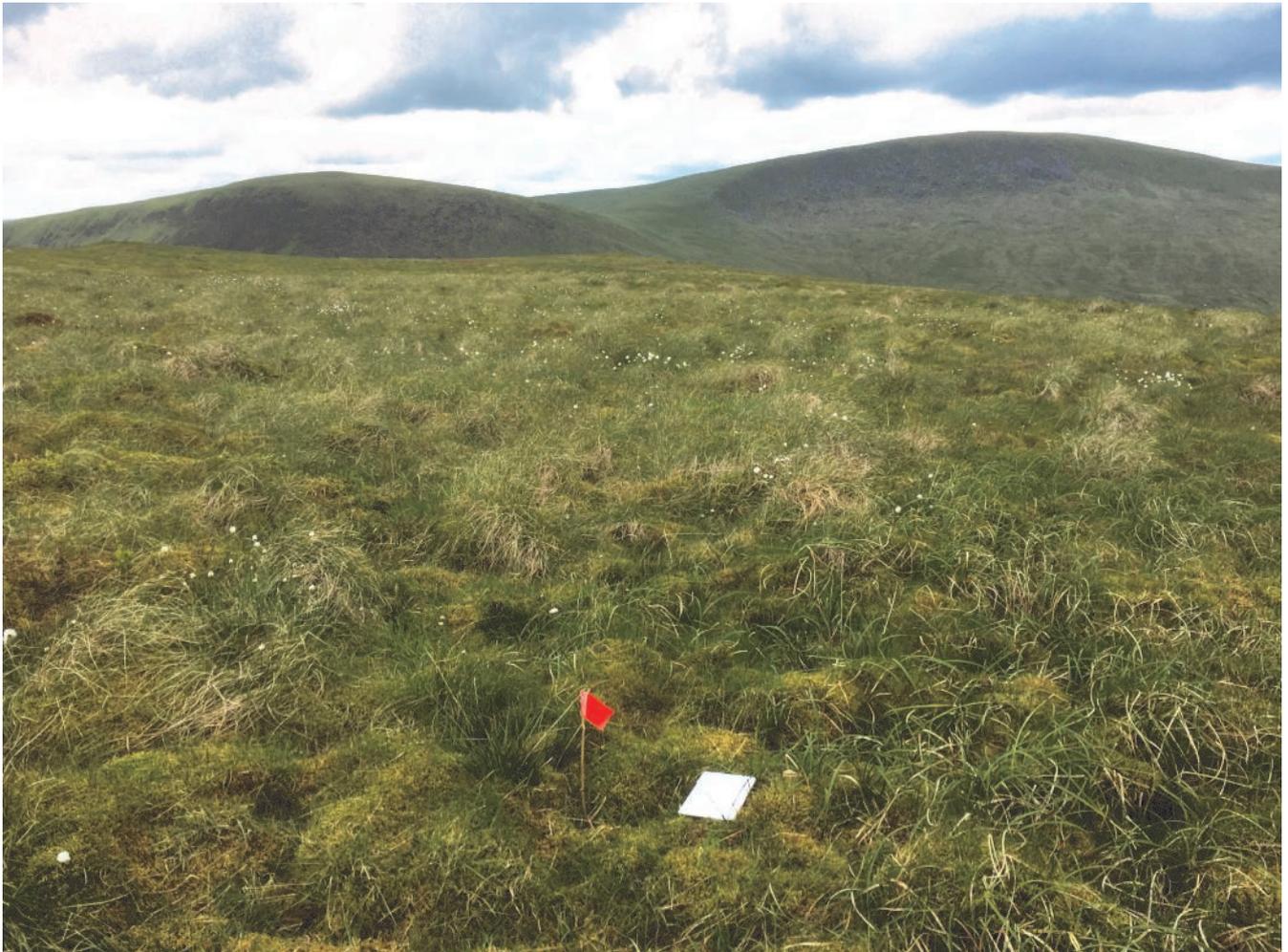


Figure. 1. Moorbrock Hill summit NX619980 - 7 June 2019.
 Photograph © Bob Merritt

Glyphesis cottonae (La Touche, 1945) rediscovered at Scaleby Moss, Cumbria

by Bob Merritt

Scaleby Moss is a 68.5 hectare Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) located about 8 kilometres north-east of Carlisle at an elevation of around 35 metres AOD. It is a raised bog that has been modified over many centuries by peat cutting and drainage works. In 1993 English Nature dug a series of six new ponds in order to encourage the continued presence of the rare White-faced Darter dragonfly *Leucorrhinia dubia* as a breeding species.

Glyphesis cottonae (Linyphiidae) is currently designated 'Vulnerable' using IUCN criteria. It was first discovered at Scaleby Moss by David Clarke on 24 April 1972 (Clarke, 1972) when he found a single male by hand-sorting *Sphagnum* moss taken from one end of a small pool where it projected about 15 cms above the water surface. A female was taken six days later. No further records were obtained until this year when I recorded six females and one male on 10 April in a small flooded former peat-cutting carpeted with *Sphagnum* moss such that no surface water was visible (figure 1). This pool, at NY 4277 6323, is situated within the same hectare as that of the original discovery although not at the same location according to David Clarke who accompanied me to the site a couple of weeks later. David's original site was relatively dry on the day of our visit and is much changed due to succession. To date, no attempt has been made to search for *G. cottonae* there.

My initial attempt to find *G. cottonae* was made using a vacuum sampler. I had my doubts about doing this at such a wet site but other people appear to have had some success with finding the spider by this means. Among the spiders I collected were two female *G. cottonae*, although I wasn't aware of having found any likely candidates at the time. Subsequently, I re-entered the pool and started searching manually (figure 2; photo taken on a later occasion) and within 20 minutes I'd collected five tiny spiders which had become dislodged from the



Fig. 2. The author in pool 1, 24 April 2019.
Photograph © D. Clarke



Figure. 1. Pool 1, Scaleby Moss, 10 April 2019.
Photograph © Bob Merritt

Sphagnum, using my finger tip to fish them out (figure 3); the pond-net in the photo was used for catching other things. I had high hopes that the spiders would turn out to be *G. cottonae* and, on later inspection under a microscope at home, indeed they were. They are so much smaller in real life than I'd expected them to be and it would be easy to mistake them in the water for minute bits of debris, especially when their legs are held close to the body.



Fig. 3. *Glyphesis cottonae* on finger tip, 28 April 2019. Photograph © D. Clarke

On 28 April, I collected a female *G. cottonae* from a neighbouring pool (figure 4) at NY 4277 6325, and another female on 6 May. This former peat-cutting is at a later successional stage than pool 1, with a more solid surface comprising various plants in addition to *Sphagnum* spp., including White Beak-sedge *Rhynchospora alba*, Cotton-grass *Eriophorum* spp., Heather *Calluna vulgaris*, Cranberry *Vaccinium oxycoccus* and a few small stunted Scots Pine *Pinus sylvestris*. Nevertheless, it was still possible to create a few trample pools, using one's body weight to depress the surface, and so collect some spiders as before at pool 1.

On 5 June I collected a female *G. cottonae* during a brief visit, in passing, to a *Sphagnum*-dominated pool at NY 4301 6334 in the adjacent monad.

There are some 30-40 pools at Scaleby Moss, in various stages of succession. To date I have sampled about a dozen of them as part of a wider-ranging survey of the spiders within the SSSI.

References:

Clarke, D., 1972. New Spider Records from Cumberland. *Newsl. Br. arachnoi. Soc.* 4: 2.

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Figure. 4. Pool 2, Scaleby Moss, 6 May 2019. Photograph © Bob Merritt

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