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Spiders and other arachnids

In last August's *Wildlife Report* (BW 10: 434), readers were urged to be on the lookout for the large and colourful *Argiope bruennichi*, which has been increasing its range beyond the Hampshire Basin in the last few years, apparently because of the milder climate. Updates on the spread of the species in Britain have appeared recently in the British Arachnological Society's *Newsletter* (87: 2) and the newsletter of the Spider Recording Scheme (35: 8). The

distribution maps in these reports show a general spread across southernmost England, with most localities being coastal – it occurs in all southern counties from Cornwall to Kent and Essex. There are a few inland sites, such as Surrey and Lincolnshire, but Derbyshire still holds the northernmost record (see map on page 365).

Another spider mentioned before in this report (BW 10: 205) is *Uloborus plumipes*. This pretty, southern European orb-weaver is turning up regularly in garden centres, apparently imported with potted plants (the 'greenhouse effect'?). The species resembles our British *U. walckenaerius* but, as its name implies, it has a clump of long hairs on the tibiae, especially on the long first leg. I potted a specimen on an indoor plant in a garden centre in Cheshire, and there are reports of the species establishing itself quite comfortably in garden-centre glasshouses in the south of England. In a similar vein, pet-shop owners and pet-keepers who keep live crickets to feed to exotic reptiles and, indeed, spiders have been reporting a common spider among their cultures. This is *Thanatus vulgaris*, a Holarctic species which I have collected in the Mediterranean. It is a sandy-brown colour, so is not easily seen among the crickets.

1999 will be remembered as a bumper year for new British records. Though not necessarily collected in that year, more species new to Britain were recognised last year than in any other I can remember, and some species recently recognised in the British Isles have been found in new localities. An example of the latter is *Neon robustus*. This little jumping spider (Salticidae) was first recognised as a British native by the Swede Lars Jonsson, who collected a specimen on Arthur's Seat in Edinburgh during an idle moment in the 17th European Colloquium of Arachnology, held in Scotland's capital in 1997. He recognised it as a species common in southern Sweden. *Neon robustus* closely resembles our native *N. reticulatus*, but is noticeably larger. One might expect spiders of the genus *Neon* to be brightly coloured or iridescent, but

they are brown with lighter brown spots and streaks, though no less charming little (2-3mm) spiders for that! News of the existence of *N. robustus* in Britain prompted arachnologists to check their holdings of specimens labelled *N. reticulatus* and, sure enough, *robustus* has turned up all over the place, including elsewhere in southern Scotland, Wicklow (Eire), the Great Orme in North Wales, Ramsey Island in South Wales, and also in England at Orford Ness, Suffolk. Detailed drawings of the palp and epigyne, as well as carapace measurements of both species, are given in Snazell *et al.* (1999: *Bull. Br. arachnol. Soc.* 11: 251-254). Size is a good discriminator between the species because there is little overlap in the ranges of carapace lengths.

Some species new to the British list were mentioned in BW 10: 435: *Zodariion rubidum* in Essex, *Ozyptila pullata* in Kent, and *Neon ?pictus* in Sussex, and to this list can be added the following. A new *Theridion* species – identity yet to be confirmed – has been collected from Wiltshire. A linyphiid from the Isle of Sheppey, known from two females and a male, belongs in *Megalephyphantes*; it may be *M. collinus* or *M. occidentalis*. Another linyphiid new to Britain has been collected from the Insh marshes, Speyside. Two males are known, which can be referred to *Wabasso*. As is common when new species turn up, Peter Merrett begins to track down their identity in the literature and unearths a whole new set of taxonomic problems, so readers must wait a while before the names of these are confirmed.

Probably the last new spider record for Britain in the second millennium was *Meioneta fuscipalpus*, a widespread but seldom recorded species in mainland Europe, a female and three males of which were found at Mildenhall air base (heathland), Suffolk, and identified on 31st December 1999. Finally, a species newly recorded from Britain, but which was actually collected in 1959 on Tresco, Isles of Scilly, is *Clubiona pseudoneglecta*. It is not surprising that the specimen was not recognised as new, because the species was described – from

Germany – only in 1994!

The end of 1999 saw the publication of the second editions of both *Ocularium* and *Galea*, newsletters of the Opiliones and pseudoscorpion recording groups, respectively. *Ocularium* comments on the further spread of *Dicranopalpus ramosus*, mentioned in BW 10: 205. This has now extended its range (via my house) to Forton, near Lancaster, and Thorpe Arch, near Wetherby, Yorkshire. So, Lancashire (just) holds the northernmost record at the time of writing. The species is easily recognisable, both sexes having a very long pedipalp with a large apophysis on the patella, nearly as long as the segment. It inhabits house walls, garden shrubs and hedges, so it is easy to check if you have it.

In *Galea*, Gerald Legg implores us to send in records even for the 'common-as-muck species' such as *Neobisium carcinoides*. Many recorders of pseudoscorpions (and, it must be added, other groups of animals and plants as well) do not bother to send records of the common species, whose true distribution therefore remains less well known than those of rarer cousins. Before you know it, something causes a contraction in range, but without good distribution data it is difficult to chart the decline and discover the reasons; witness the changes in status of the House Sparrow (BW 10: 381), which is absent from my present garden.

I thank members of Council of the British Arachnological Society for their help in compiling this report.

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Records of *Argiope bruennichi* in Britain to October 1999. Map courtesy of Peter Harvey, Spider Recording Scheme National Organiser.

