Spinning and Weaving

by Paul Selden

Thus, spinning and weaving, as all clothiers know, are quite different processes, and both are performed by the spider differently. The silken thread is first produced from the spigots (it is spun), then it is woven into a web by muscular actions of the spinnerets. Not always, of course – the dragline is simply spun and then left behind as the spider moves about. But most spiders weave silk into a variety of objects: capture webs, retreats, burrow linings, sleeping bags, egg-sacs, and so on.

Ever since arachnologists started writing, there has been confusion between spinning and weaving. More often than not, writers use spinning when they mean weaving. Spiders do not spin webs! They weave them, from silk produced by their silk-spinning organs.

So: here is a plea. Can we use these words correctly in future? The English language is full of subtlety, and distinguishes the details between different activities. After all, we owe it to the spiders, who invented these processes long before Man and other species stumped upon them!

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BOOK REVIEW: A pictorial guide to the baboon spiders of Southern Africa, by Patrick Gildenhuys


Just before Christmas I was contacted by friends in South Africa regarding the publication of an exciting new book on Southern African baboon spiders. From what I understand very few people knew the author was working on this project, so it was very much a bolt from the blue. Given my longstanding taxonomic interest in African theraphosid spiders, I contacted the author to obtain my copy. I waited anxiously over the Christmas holidays for its delivery, eagerly unwrapping the book on its arrival in the New Year. To my relief this was not a book addressing the taxonomy of Southern African theraphosids, a project I have been undertaking myself for well over a decade.

The book is professionally typeset in an attractive modern fashion and written in a way that is accessible to both the public and more technically inclined reader. Patrick has logically divided the book into several short chapters: Author’s note, Acknowledgements, Classification, Introduction, Morphology, Routes travelled and Glossary. However, the main body of the book is devoted to illustrating the theraphosid diversity found within each of South Africa’s provinces: Western Cape, Eastern Cape, Northern Cape, Free State, Gauteng, North West, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo, Mpumalanga; there is also a section entitled ‘Harpaictirinae from Southern African regions’, which covers a few species from other African countries.