SPIDERS

(ILLUSTRATED)

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BY

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Preface (About the Book)

THE modest dimensions of this book are perhaps sufficient indication that it is not intended as an aid to the collector. There are about five hundred and fifty known species of spiders in the United Kingdom alone, and at least an equal number of pages would be needed to describe them.

Our concern is with the habits and modes of life of spiders—especially of such as are most frequently met with and most easily recognised, and the reader, especially if he is fortunate enough to spend an occasional holiday in southern Europe, will find little in the following pages which he cannot verify—or disprove—by his own observations. Indeed the hope that some of his readers may be induced to investigate on their own account has actuated the writer throughout, and has led him to lay considerable stress upon the methods of research and the ingeniously devised experiments by means of which whatever knowledge we possess has been obtained.

CECIL WARBURTON

Cambridge

March, 1912

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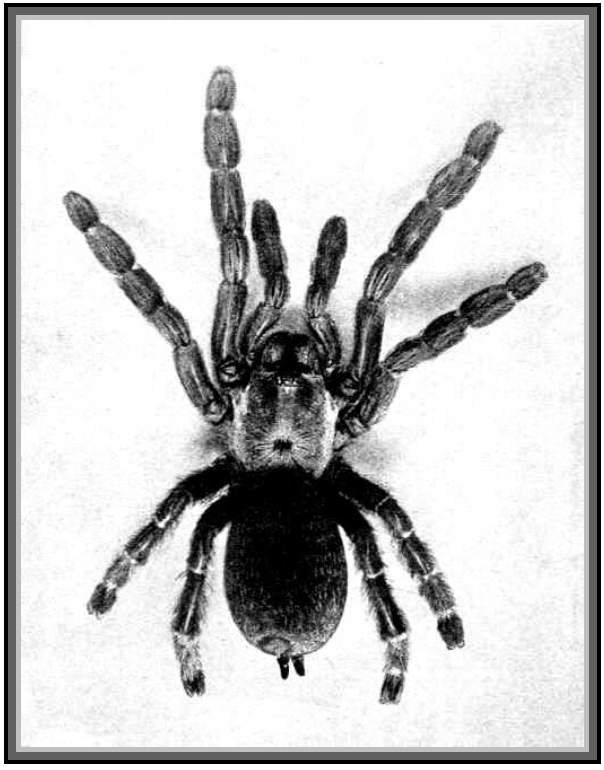


SPIDERS

BY

CECIL WARBURTON, M.A.

Christ's College
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Society, 1912



The Banana Spider, natural size, from a photograph by Mr James Adams.

Chapter I

A Survey of the Field

There are certain days of the year when the immense wealth of spider industry going on all around us is revealed in a way calculated to strike even the least observant. We all know—and derive no peculiarly pleasant thrill from the knowledge—that we can, if so minded, find abundance of cobwebs and their occupants by visiting the cellar or the tool-house; and probably we have all at times noticed, with a languid interest, large circular webs on our favourite rose-bushes, with a spider motionless in the centre.

But some spring or autumn morning, when the night has been foggy and the sun has only just succeeded in dispersing the mists, every bush and hedge is seen to be draped, every square foot of lawn and meadow to be carpeted with spiders' silk. There has been no special activity in the domain of these creatures, but every silken line is beaded with drops perhaps fifty times its diameter, and what yesterday required careful observation to detect is now visible yards away, and we realise for once something of the prodigious activity constantly going on though ordinarily unnoted.

And it never entirely ceases. True hibernation, if it ever occurs, is not the rule among spiders, and there is no time of the year when some species may not be found at work. Beat trees or bushes over an old umbrella, or sweep grass and herbage with a sweeping net in summer, and you will never draw a blank—some spiders are sure to be found. In winter such measures are profitless, but if you take the trouble to grub among ground vegetation, or shake fallen leaves over a newspaper, or search under stones or logs of wood you will have

no difficulty in finding spiders enough, and by no means dormant. I have even seen an enthusiastic collector remove inches of snow and disinter rare species from among the roots of the grass beneath!

Spiders, then, are plentiful enough, and it is not only individuals that are numerous but there are vastly more kinds or species than most people dream of. The Rev. O. Pickard-Cambridge, in a book under the modest title of *The Spiders of Dorset* indispensable to all British collectors, quaintly observes that most of his friends claim acquaintance with three kinds of spiders—the garden spider, the harvest spider and the little red spider—two of which, as it happens, are not spiders at all. Yet the British List contains about five hundred and fifty species, and the spiders of the world, though only very partially investigated, already include many thousands of known and described forms.

In this little work we shall not at all consider the spider tribe from the collector's point of view. We shall concern ourselves rather with habits and modes of life and such structural modifications as are correlated therewith. Certain well-defined groups of spiders we shall recognise, but specific names will interest us little. And we might do worse than step out on such a spring morning as we have imagined and rapidly survey the field which lies open for our investigation.

First, then, examine a little more closely one of the garden bushes in which the spiders have been so busy, and the chances are that three different types of snare will be readily distinguishable. There are sure to be some of the familiar wheel-like snares of *Epeira*, but note also the fine-spun hammocks of *Linyphia* with stay-lines above and below, and the irregular labyrinths of *Theridion*, its lines crossing and recrossing without apparent method. These are sedentary spiders, and always to be found at home. All spiders spin

for some purpose or other, but these—or at all events *Epeira*—have brought the art to its highest perfection. Leave them for the present and examine a sunny wall or fence. You may chance to see a little zebra-striped, flat-bodied spider exploring the surface and directing its opera-glass-like eyes in all directions in search of prey. This is one of the Attidae or jumping spiders—few and sober-coloured in this country, but extraordinarily abundant and often extremely beautiful in tropical regions. Pause at the iron railing before leaving the garden and observe how the topmost bar and the knobs which crown the uprights are alive with spiders, mostly very small, and obviously of many different kinds, extremely busy about something that it may be worth while to investigate later; then go on into the lane, and note, in the banks of the hedge-rows the great sheet-webs and tubes of *Agelena*, a near relative of the house-spider, but with a cobweb, thanks to its situation, comparatively free from accumulations of dust and filth.

The creatures skipping, dry-shod, on the surface of the river or pond, though often called water-spiders, are true insects. The real water-spider, *Argyroneta*, which, though air-breathing, spends most of its time below the surface of the water, is not to be found everywhere, but there are many riparian species which are semi-amphibious in their habits and have no objection to a wetting.

Finally, turn into the wood and look carefully on the ground, especially where last year's leaves are still lying. You are certain to see a few—and may very likely see countless myriads—of sober coloured, rapidly moving "wolf-spiders" (Lycosidae), roaming in quest of food. No stay-at-homes, these, but rovers, trusting to speed and agility, and not to guile, for their food supply.

All the spiders we have observed so far are in active pursuit of their daily business, but if we turn over stones, or logs, or look under

sheets of loose bark, we shall find others, quiescent for the moment, but waiting for nightfall to begin their operations.

But we have probably seen enough to show that a pretty wide field for investigation lies immediately at hand, and that a detailed study of what we have cursorily glanced at will occupy us so long that we shall have little time for considering the spiders of other lands. In the first place, however, we had better make quite sure of what is meant by a spider.
