

SPIDER HUNTING

IN MALAYSIA

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Spiders are some of the coolest creatures on the planet. They occur in almost every habitat from the sea shore to the snow line on our highest mountains. When it comes to catching their prey, they have thought of just about every trick in the book. From just jumping on your next meal to making complex webs to catch it in. From elastic sticky threads that pull insects into the air to pretending to be a female moth and luring males to their doom. They can also have the most bizarre body shapes and colours which make them the most beautiful and fascinating animals to study.

Each year myself and a group of colleagues take a group of students from Plymouth University to peninsular Malaysia to study tropical biology and while there I can't resist hunting for some of the region's strange and wacky spiders. We stay at a small village known as Frasers Hill which is upland forest in the main range behind Kuala Lumpur. Once there we encourage our students to come out on night walks through the forest to see how many different kinds of invertebrate we can find. These are just some of the amazing spiders that we have encountered on these walks.

Golden orbweb spiders

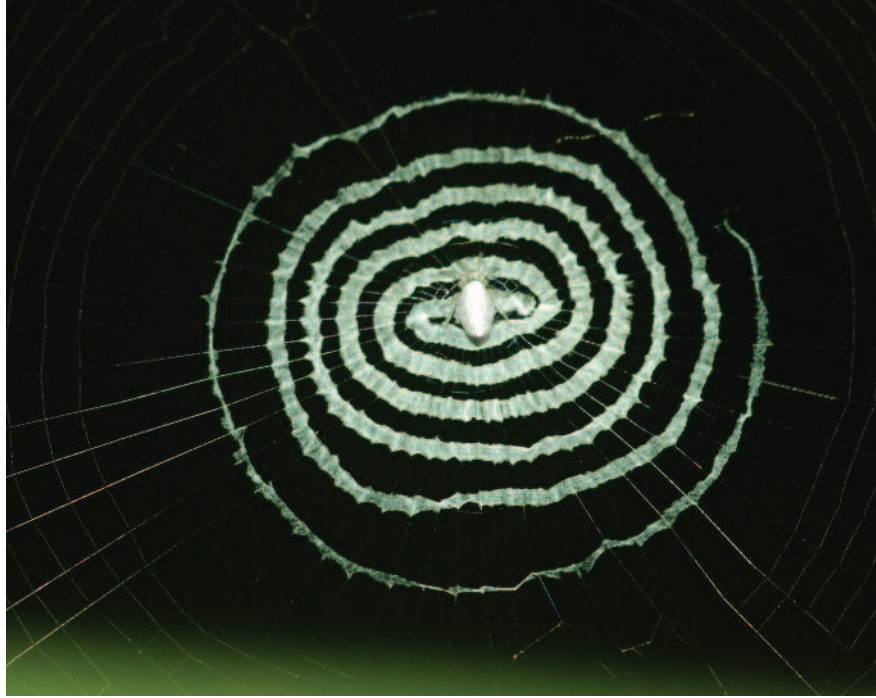
Family Tetragnathidae, Genus *Nephila*.

These are the largest orbweb spiders on the planet and they produce huge webs that can be over two metres across. They are made of a very tough silk that is golden in colour. The female abdomen can reach a length of 50mm while the male is only 5mm in length.

Garbage line spiders

Family Araneidae, Genus *Cyclosa*.

These are very small orbweb spiders that often decorate their webs with a wide spiral of white silk. They keep the remains of their prey and make a line of the rubbish across the centre of their web. The spider can then sit in the centre almost invisible to would be predators.



St. Andrews Cross spiders

Family Araneidae, Genus *Argiope*.

These make vertical orb webs but often produce x shaped bands of white silk across the web. The spider sits in the centre with its legs on the bands which could make it look larger than it is but at the moment no one really knows what these bands are for. They are always brightly coloured with yellow bands across their abdomens. This is thought to help attract insects, especially grasshoppers to the webs. A bad mistake that the insects don't realise until it is too late.



Long jawed orb weavers

Family Tetragnathidae.

These make horizontal orb webs amongst low vegetation in damp situations, often close to water. These have very long front legs and often have colourful abdomens which like the St. Andrews Cross spiders may help attract prey to the web.



Huntsman spiders

Family Sparasidae.

These are very common on roadside banks, on tree trunks and the forest floor. They have long legs to feel their way and detect their prey with fine hairs on their legs that are sensitive to vibrations.



Jumping spiders

Family Salticidae.

These are the coolest spiders of all. They have excellent vision and hunt their prey by sight. They have two large eyes that take up almost all of the front of their head and then six other eyes on the top and back of their heads. These are the only spiders to see in colour and can see as well as we can. If you watch one it will often stop and look up at you turning its head as it does so as if it is wondering what you are up to.



Lynx spiders

Family Oxyopidae.

These are the spiny legged hunting spiders. They live in low vegetation and trees where they sense their prey with the long hairs on their legs and then jump on them.





Burrowing Tarantulas

Family Theraphosidae.

These are large hairy spiders that live in burrows they have dug in roadside banks. They remain deep in the burrow in the daytime weaving a curtain of silk across the entrance to keep the humid air in. At night they sit with their legs at the entrance waiting for insects to pass by.

Segmented Trapdoor Spiders

Family Liphistidae.

This is the oldest and most primitive group of spiders on the planet as they still have a series of armoured plates on the upper surface of their abdomen. They also live in burrows in roadside banks but weave a silken hinged trap door across the entrance. This keeps out water and any unwanted visitors. Radiating from the burrow are a series of silken trip lines that tell the spider if lunch is passing by. They also spend the day deep in the burrow but sit at the entrance at night ready to grab anything that triggers a trip line.

