



Scottish Arachnid Myths

by Chris Cathrine

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There are a number of arachnid myths and folk tales in Scotland, dating back centuries. Many have been lost over the years. One of these takes the form of a poem about a harvestman. It is believed to be from the island of Orkney, but is also traditional in Caithness (the area of Scottish mainland south of Orkney).

Here it is, in the Scots language:

Kirsty, Kirsty Kringlik,
Gae me nieve a tinglik.
What shall yeh,
For supper ha'e?
Deer, sheer, bret an' smear,
Minch-meat sma' or nane ave?
Kirsty Kringlik rin awa!

If you happen to be Scottish you may understand the poem. However, in case you're not and you don't, here is my English interpretation of it:

Kirsty, Kirsty Kringlik,
Give my hand a tickle.
What shall I,
For dinner have?
Venison, stew, bread and fish,
Mince-meat small or none at all?
Kirsty Kringlik run away!



The poem would be recited when a child cradled a harvestman in their hand ('nieve' means a closed hand). When the child opens their hand to let the harvestman go, they check to see if it has left a droplet of liquid.

The liquid would have been a defensive chemical produced by the harvestman, who would have been rather scared after being captured and held in a child's hand! But according to the myth behind the poem, if a droplet is left it shows that the child is going to have a good dinner tonight! So, the child would want the harvestman to leave the droplet, which presumably would tickle their hand.

Do you know of any interesting myths, stories or poems like this one? If so please do let us know about it. We're not aware of any others about harvestmen, outside Scotland.

Chris