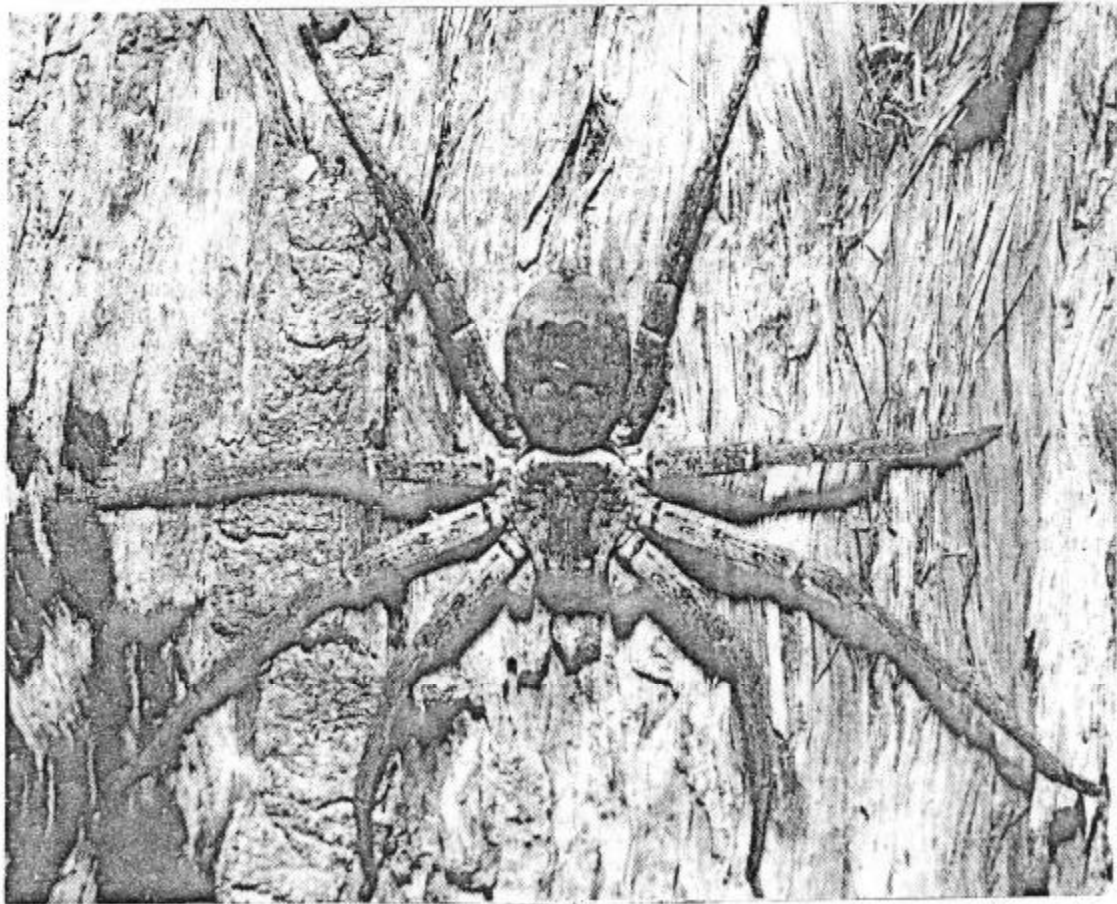


AUSTRALASIAN



Common Huntsman Spider (Heteropoda jugulans)

ARACHNOLOGY :1

Welcome to the Australasian Arachnological Society.

AIM: At present the aim of this society is that of other arachnological societies - to promote the study of arachnids, in our case especially Australasian arachnids. In time this aim may become more refined. The newsletter is intended as a means of communication between arachnologists-amateurs and professionals.

THANKS: My thanks are due to those professionals who corresponded with interested amateurs in their regions.

APOLOGIES: I had hoped to produce this newsletter sooner. However, I hoped to have membership up to 50, which would allow us to take advantage of lower postage rates, before sending the newsletter out. We are now at about 40.

OFFICERS, MEETINGS.

Several aspects of this society are highly unusual, although in time some of these can be remedied. Firstly, we have no officers except myself as newsletter editor. For the present, I believe that the barest minimum is necessary. However, on all points I am open to suggestion. Second, meetings will be at best regional, if at all. But if meetings do occur, the proceedings can be included in the newsletter. It has been suggested that the Australasian Arachnological Society could be a subgroup of an entomological society. Because Australasian entomology is so advanced compared with arachnology this would be generally undesirable.

AUSTRALASIAN SPIDER TAXONOMY

As a mygalomorph taxonomist I will direct my prime attention here at Australian spider taxonomy. The New Zealand arachnids are being described by Forster et al., and now more diverse disciplines are being studied in that country. New Guinea arachnids are treated by numerous taxonomists around the world.

Until the basic taxonomic work has been completed, other studies, except on the few 'well-known' species, cannot successfully proceed. However, through popular publications, such as those of Hickman's on Tasmanian spiders, and of Mascord's and Main's books, people interested in spiders who do not have access to vital early texts may identify some species.

By 1939, Bonnet in his *Bibliographia Araneorum* listed about 1350 Australian spider species. About 1000 of these were described only in European journals or books that are very rare in Australia. Of those species remaining, the Tasmanian species have been described by Hickman et al., the Western Australian species by Simon, the Victorian species by Hogg and Butler, and assorted collections by Rainbow and Pulleine. A conservative estimate of the Australian spider fauna projected from Forster's work on New Zealand spiders suggests that half of the Australian spider fauna is yet to be described. In a recent survey of coastal rainforests of Queensland by the Queensland Museum, about 900 spider species were collected. Of these from 13-19% (depending on the region) were identifiable as described species; from 35-42% could be placed only in a genus; the remainder belonged to no known genus and could therefore be placed only in a subfamily or family. But, apart from Tasmania, of all the states Queensland probably has the greatest number of its spiders described. Moreover, no single recent publication exists listing all known Australian spiders. Thus, Australian spider taxonomy is about 50 years behind the rest of the world.

PROPOSED NEWSLETTER CONTENTS

One of the things I hope to be able to publish is keys to families, genera and possibly species of the arachnid groups, or to direct interested arachnologists to useful references. From time to time, I hope to include a short section written by professionals giving suggestions as to procedures and problem solving. I also hope to compile a list of Australian spiders from Bonnet's *Bibliographia Araneorum*. Such a list would have minimal information, owing to the enormous drain on time. For the next newsletter, I hope to produce a list of Australian arachnologists, their interests and their addresses. Consequently, I am open to suggestions as to newsletter contents.

MEMBERSHIP FEES

Membership fees at present need only cover the cost of the newsletter and its postage. The newsletter costs about 5¢ per page. I will be unable to send copies to unfinancial members as I shall bear the brunt of initial costs personally. I expect to produce about 4 newsletters a year, depending upon demand and your submissions, and local support.

MY POSITION

I am in a privileged position at the Queensland Museum, in that I have the advice of Dr Valerie Davies, the Curator of Arachnids, who has seen most of the Australian spider types in Europe; and the excellent library of the Museum contains considerable literature on spiders. My own experience is best in the Mygalomorphae, however, as with any interested naturalist, my interests are diverse. I should make it quite clear that the aims of this newsletter do not include publications of new descriptions or new ideas of controversial nature. These are best submitted to the many journals that are appropriate for such data. Moreover, a large membership and numerous active researchers are necessary to sustain a journal of our own. It is hoped that this newsletter will help bring such a journal into existence in years to come. I do hope that the newsletter will contain articles of general interest, lists of spiders, a question-answer section, requests for spiders, lists of publications, advice of meetings, and lists of general literature relevant to Australian arachnologists.

RECENT ARACHNOLOGICAL LITERATURE

Although Zoological Record is about 6 years behind with the Arachnida, a valuable publication by the Centre International du Documentation Arachnologique (C.I.D.A.) is the Travaux des Arachnologues, which exists from 1967 to present. It is produced annually and lists papers on arachnids appearing that year and sometimes includes papers in press. C.I.D.A. relies upon contributions, and although it is not cross referenced, Travaux is an invaluable publication for any serious arachnologist. C.I.D.A. also produces a list of arachnologists with their interests and addresses. To contribute to C.I.D.A. interested persons should write to Dr Barbara York Main, Department of Zoology, University of Western Australia, Nedlands, 6009, W.A. Minimum contribution is 45 ff. New Zealand arachnologists should write to Dr R.R. Forster, Otago Museum, Great King St, Dunedin, New Zealand.

RECOMMENDED READING

For beginning arachnologists:

It is important that beginning arachnologists understand that the identification of arachnids is impossible simply from a photograph or slide alone. In some New Zealand groups that are better known such casual identifications may be possible but are not recommended; and they do no justice to the depth of work involved in their taxonomy. Consequently, novices should understand the important, key characters of their internal anatomy, such as tracheal spiracles and trachea. For this purpose, the first part of Spiders of New Zealand, by R.R. Forster (alone) is highly recommended. Although it is for New Zealand spiders, the book is well illustrated and has a glossary of terms and a key to families. It is available from Entomological Supplies, KIWONG, Sydney. Once the basic aspects of their anatomy have been understood, this information should be tested by collecting a common local spider and keying it out.

AUSTRALIAN SPIDERS

Several books are very useful for Australian spider enthusiasts. The colour books of Ramon Mascord and Densley Clyne are valuable; however, several identifications may change as more taxonomic work is completed on spiders. Dr B.Y. Main's books are useful to understand aspects of biology and behaviour of Australian spiders. Unfortunately, the Jacaranda field guide by Main is out of print but it is very useful and any copies should be treasured. Another useful guide is Professor Hickman's "Common Spiders of Tasmania"; his identificatory keys and notes help to fill numerous gaps in our knowledge. More specific identifications usually require consultation with the original description and a good quality binocular stereo-dissecting microscope.

New Zealand arachnologists should be aware of the continuing monograph on spiders of that country by Dr R.R. Forster in the Bulletin of the Otago Museum; and also of the Popular book by Dr Forster and Mrs Forster.

For Serious arachnologists:

You will quickly realize that identifications are fraught with difficulty when using a key. Especially so when an author embodies his classification in the key. In time, and with familiarity with the expected fauna, keys cease to be necessary (see note below on keys). When collecting spiders, keep a good record of its habitat, the web or burrow it came from, the date and locality. For longevity in ethanol a pencil label is only excelled by label written in Indian Ink. If you intend to keep the spiders for sometime, ensure that the bottles are tightly stopped or are 'swimming' in a large bottle of alcohol. When you examine a spider a pencil drawing may assist later recall. Do not overlook small points! I first noticed plumose hairs when I thought that the legs looked 'strange'. A good naturalist must be a good observer. Do not always trust early arachnologists to make accurate descriptions; remember, their implements were not the best. Often early taxonomists gave brief descriptions (some recent authors continue the habit) and no illustration of value. However, they usually noted the unique or special features, as they saw them. Often, these features were not as unique as they had thought. On the other hand, some taxonomists failed to see the obvious or describe it correctly. My own experience has been with the incorrect description of the fovea of Aname by Rainbow.

THE USE OF KEYS

Keys are widespread instruments used in taxonomic studies. They are sometimes intelligible only to their authors; they usually serve a primary classificatory function, with identification as a secondary aspect; and they should be used with great care. Keys are devices which unlock doors; however, there are no doors or rigid partitions in nature, and this is where the difficulties arise. The best procedure in using a key is never to use it as a final answer but merely as a guide to be checked by a full familial, generic or specific description. A common practice to be aware of in the use of keys is to pull out the odd-balls first; thus, beware of a doubtful first couplet.

FINALLY

I hope you are interested to go further, if there is something that you wish to see in the newsletter which I have not mentioned, please let me know. Subscriptions: \$2.00 per annum sent to Australasian Arachnological Society, P.O. Box 573, Fortitude Valley, 4006, Q.

A note on Pediana: an elusive sparassid.

J. White (South Australia) reports what is believed to be the first record of the genus in S.A. from Oodnadatta.

Editor's note: This is surprising as Pediana regina (?) is a common spider under the bark of trees in Western Queensland. My own experiences are that it is common in the Birdsville area, but stays away from flood plains. I would be surprised if it did not occur widely in Central, Western and Southern Australia.

PLEASE REMEMBER, THE NEXT NEWSLETTER RELIES UPON YOU FOR SUGGESTIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS - BOTH ARACHNOLOGICAL AND MONETARY.

Robert J. Raven
Editor