

Zoropsis spinimana (Dufour, 1820) established indoors in Britain

by Peter Harvey

On 21st September 2012 Heather Ticheli found a large spider in her clothes and left the beast to die on a pavement in Islington, London (Fig. 1). She wondered whether an unidentified bite she had received the previous week was from a similar spider that may be living in her house, and she sent the picture to Pip Collyer in an effort to find out what spider was involved. Pip forwarded this to me for my opinion and all we could suggest from the picture was that it looked rather like a lycosid, and a specimen was needed.



Figure 1. *Zoropsis spinimana* on London pavement. Photograph © Heather Ticheli

Heather then captured another of the spiders in her home in London WC1, which was apparently nowhere near as big, but with the same violin-shape mark, and she was able to send this to me. It was an adult female *Zoropsis spinimana* (Zoropsidae), a family not previously represented in Britain. *Zoropsis spinimana* is a Mediterranean species, which although harmless to humans, is one of the very few spiders in Europe which can penetrate the human skin with its chelicerae and produce a painful bite. The Spiders of Europe website at <http://www.araneae.unibe.ch> (Nentwig, *et al.*) lists seven species of *Zoropsis* with distribution information by Platnick (2012), *Zoropsis beccarii* Caporiacco, 1935 from Turkey, *Zoropsis bilineata* Dahl, 1901 from Mallorca,

Morocco, Algeria, *Zoropsis lutea* (Thorell, 1875) from Eastern Mediterranean, Ukraine, *Zoropsis media* Simon, 1878 from Western Mediterranean, *Zoropsis oertzeni* Dahl, 1901 from Italy, Greece, Balkans, *Zoropsis spinimana* from Mediterranean to Russia (USA, introduced) and *Zoropsis thaleri* Levy, 2007 from Turkey, Lebanon, Syria, Israel. Griswold & Ubick (2001) document the establishment of *Z. spinimana* in the San Francisco Bay area in the USA since at least 1995.

Heather says the first *Zoropsis* she can document appeared in her home in February 2012 (Fig. 2) and she did see a few more from February to September but did not photograph them. However, in October in the past few weeks she has seen the one trapped in her clothing, another near the ceiling (a photo provided) and another in the bathroom (an adult male, Fig. 3). These photos include what is clearly an adult male and a juvenile, as well as other probable females.



Figure 2. *Zoropsis spinimana* taken in February 2012. Photograph © Heather Ticheli

In April 2011 Stuart Hines at the Natural History Museum had emailed me about a *Zoropsis spinimana* found in South Kensington locally by a gentleman in his garden. He wondered if this was just an individual or perhaps one of a small population and the spearhead of the establishment of this species in the UK, although he said he had no evidence of the latter other than this single record. Although aware that the spider had been introduced and was well established in the USA in California, I replied that I would be amazed if such a southern European spider currently became established in Britain unless our climate really did change far beyond the present. However it is now beginning to look as though it

might already be well established in parts of London, and is certainly established in Heather Ticheli's home with at least an adult female, adult male, juvenile and other adults or subadults. I will clearly have to eat my words, and it looks as though it is another species to be added to the British checklist.



Figure 3. Male *Zoropsis spinimana* taken in February 2012. Photograph © Heather Ticheli

Peter Merrett (pers. comm.) thinks it seems unlikely that it could survive long-term outdoors here, but he supposes it could live indoors and occasionally venture into gardens in the summer. He says it is not really all that much more surprising than say *Steatoda nobilis* or even *Segestria florentina*. There is some evidence that *Zoropsis spinimana* may be spreading in Europe. In Oct. 1997 a female *Z. spinimana* was found on the wall of a house in Innsbruck, N. Tyrol, and since non-adult specimens had also been observed in S. Tyrol, Thaler & Knoflach (1998) suppose that *Z. spinimana* may be an expansive species and a recent addition to the urban fauna of Austria. Wittenberg (2005) describes the first record in Switzerland of an individual caught in 1994 in a residential house in Basel, with other records since reported from houses in the south of Switzerland. Hänggi & Bolzern (2006) report the first two records of *Zoropsis spinimana* in Germany, together with a further discovery of the species in Central Switzerland. A spreading of the species from South to North along traffic routes is supposed and climate change is suggested as a possible reason for the species establishing itself in Central Europe.

Wittenberg (2005) suggests that monitoring of some selected species (e.g. *Oecobius maculatus* Simon and

Zoropsis spinimana) to document their spread would be both worthwhile and manageable. In the USA the California Academy of Sciences has been doing this very successfully on the *Bay Area's Most Wanted Spider* website. The website states that the first California reports of *Zoropsis spinimana* were from the Sunnyvale area of Santa Clara County in 1992, since when the spider has mostly spread north and east around the San Francisco Bay area with specimens found throughout Santa Clara, San Mateo and Alameda Counties. It seems that we should probably undertake a similar exercise in Britain, to monitor the spider's spread in and beyond London. This would not be difficult to set up on the Spider and Harvestman Recording Scheme Website at <http://srs.britishspiders.org.uk> - watch this space!

References

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Xysticus acerbus Thorell, 1872 (Thomisidae) in Surrey

by Jonty Denton

On 26.7.2011 I swept a large, very dark *Xysticus* from herbage at the edge of deciduous woodland on the chalk, at Silent Pool, Surrey (TQ0648). I had thought it may be *X. luctuosus*, but Peter Harvey kindly offered to check the specimen and determined it as *X. acerbus*. (Unfortunately this record had gone to press and was published in Denton (2011). This appears to be the first record of this enigmatic species from VC17. Amazingly the same sweep