

Focus on *Pholcus*

The long-legged spider *Pholcus phalangioides* (Fuesslin, 1775) is quite frequently the subject of short notes or letters sent in by members. Here are extracts from a few recent communications:

Michael Davies of Yelverton in Devon writes: 'I was very interested in the short article by Raymond Crooke on araneophagy in *Pholcus phalangioides* (Newsletter 93). This is the dominant spider species throughout our late-Victorian house, including the cellar. During the 18 years we have lived there, I have witnessed interactions between *P. phalangioides* and *Tegenaria domestica* on at least ten occasions. The sequence of events is always the same. It starts with the *Tegenaria* blundering into the fine threads of the *Pholcus* web. From this point on it seems doomed because, although it lashes out in an attempt to engage the alerted *Pholcus*, it is unable to free itself and is soon exhausted by its struggles; then *Pholcus* approaches to administer the *coup de grâce*. The victim is then wrapped up exactly as shown in Raymond Crooke's excellent photograph. I also agree with his conclusion about established populations of *T. domestica*: our woodshed has several populations of that species and I have yet to see a single *P. phalangioides* there.'

John Partridge, of Redditch in Worcestershire, on re-reading Bristowe (1958. *The World of Spiders*. Collins, London) wondered if the 'dividing line' north of which no *Pholcus phalangioides* are likely to be found passed across Worcestershire. An enquiry to the county's Biological Records Centre yielded only three records, but an appeal through the Worcestershire Recorders' Group brought a reasonable response. The newest house producing a record was only ten years old, the oldest over a century. Records also came from pubs (usually from the gents' toilets), a garden centre, a school and an abbey. In one place, some were found in the underside corners of a table, which supports the idea that they get transported in furniture. All records were plotted on a vice-county map: although there is a heavy bias towards the Malvern area, distribution is sufficiently widespread throughout the county to indicate that 'the line' lies further north.

John Parker recalls that a few years ago when he returned home to Keswick after a stay in his daughter's house at Kemble in Gloucestershire, he brought four subadult female *Pholcus phalangioides* back with him. Three were released in his integral garage and were never seen again. The fourth, released in a utility room, was not seen again until early the next year, under a high shelf. It shifted position to about 25 cm above the floor between a refrigerator and a drier; there it stayed for nearly two years. During all this time it was not seen to feed, nor did it have access to any water. It disappeared again over the next winter, only to reappear in the spring; since then it has regularly shifted its position within the utility room and an adjacent w.c., returning to some locations several times. Conclusions: that *P. phalangioides* is a synanthropic spider which can survive for at least three years with little or nothing to eat or drink and has some sort of 'homing instinct'.

Editor's note: I first met *Pholcus* in the mid 1970s on the Gower Peninsula; surprisingly, this was a first record for South Wales. When I told David Mackie about it, he suggested that this must have been a recent introduction, because he had led a field meeting on the Gower some years previously and they hadn't found it. On subsequent

visits, we found *Pholcus* all over Gower inside and outside buildings; the most memorable instance of the latter was a huge female picked out by torchlight as she careered along a hedgerow at Horton late one September evening. Like John Parker, I tried to set up a colony of *Pholcus* at home by introducing a few females into our garage: these disappeared without trace, but almost exactly one year later I captured a mature male in a bedroom. That was in our previous house. Our present place has cellars and last autumn, to my surprise, I discovered that a small group of *Pholcus* had set up in the darkest corner of the cellar. I can only conclude that the spiders were introduced with the wine that a neighbour brought back from France to thank us for 'cat sitting' whilst he was away.

Compiled by J.E.D.

Record of the Mediterranean Spider *Uroctea durandi* (Latreille, 1809) in Britain

by Paul Selden

A visit by the British Myriapod and Isopod Group (BMIG) to the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, on 13th October 2002, resulted in a few spiders being collected in the Princess of Wales Conservatory by Helen Read, along with the myriapods and crustaceans. These I identified as *Dysdera crocata* C. L. Koch, 1838, *Segestria bavarica* C. L. Koch 1843, and *Achaearanea tepidariorum* (C. L. Koch, 1841). A few weeks later, I received another spider from Helen, which had been found on 1st November 2002 in the Tropical Nursery Glasshouse, and passed on by Sandra Bell of Kew Gardens. Clearly, some interest in creepy-crawly things had been stirred up by the BMIG visit!

The new spider had been found on a potting bench on which recently imported Cork Oak (*Quercus suber*) bark was being sawn up for use. The grower thought it possible that the spider had dropped off the bark whilst it was being cut up. I identified the spider as the common and distinctive Mediterranean oecobiid *Uroctea durandi* (Latreille, 1809). This attractive spider, about 15 mm long, blackish in colour, with a pointed abdomen bearing five large, yellowish spots, constructs a web somewhat reminiscent in shape of London's Millennium Dome beneath stones on the forest floor. The grower was almost certainly correct in surmising that the spider had been imported with the Portuguese cork bark.

Given its predominantly Mediterranean distribution, it is very unlikely that *Uroctea* could survive in Britain outside a conservatory. Nevertheless, this is another foreign spider (alongside *Uloborus plumipes* Lucas, 1846, for example) which could be found in garden centres throughout the country: I urge arachnologists to acquaint themselves with the appearance of this spider (see, for example, Hillyard 1997, p. 58) and to keep an eye out for it when selecting their indoor plants.

Reference

Hillyard, P. D. (1997) *Gem Spiders Photoguide*. HarperCollins, Glasgow.

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