



Orbweb spiders to identify with confidence in Autumn

Spiders are one of Britain's largest, most diverse and most important groups of invertebrates, but are notoriously difficult or impossible to identify in the field and mostly require the use of a microscope. There are, however, notable exceptions. Even in these, only the adults can be reliably identified, and often only the female adults! There are seven British species of Orbweb spider and amongst these, several females of the species of the genus *Araneus* can be identified by eye. Two of these species are still around in October and even into November, being killed off by the first frosts. The females are large conspicuous spiders with distinctive markings.

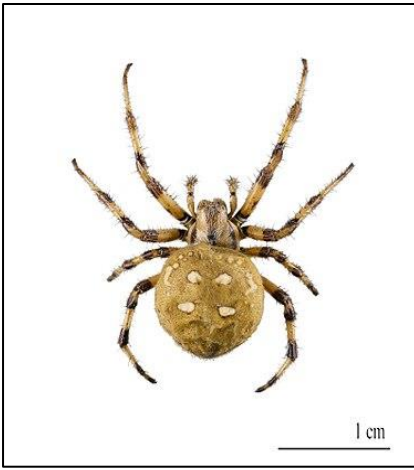
Orbwebs will be very familiar to readers, but members of only four of the spider families of British spiders actually make them. The frame of an orbweb anchors it to supporting structures and provides an attachment for the radial threads, which radiate from a central hub. These in turn support a spiral that is sticky. This can be because it has glue droplets on it, but sometimes tangled cribellate silk provides the 'stickiness'. The two species described below place glue on their webs.

The one readers are most likely to encounter is the Garden spider, *Araneus diadematus*, the best known and most common of the Orbweb spiders. The base colour of this spider's abdomen ranges from pale yellow, green through to dark brown and it has a light brown *carapace* (upper surface of the front 'half' of the spider comprising thorax and false head), usually with some darker markings and a covering of white hairs. The *folium*, the broad leaf-like area on and either side of the midline of the abdomen, is white-edged. The front portion of the abdomen almost always has a cross-like pattern of pale or white spots and markings centrally, which gives rise to the popular name of Cross spider. The 'shoulders' of the abdomen can be angular and occasionally form small humps. The legs are pale brown with darker rings and numerous spines.



Araneus diadematus female – Wikipedia image

Another species that you may come across is the Four-spotter Orbweb spider, *Araneus quadratus*, but to see this you will most likely have to visit an area of undisturbed herbaceous vegetation and shrubs, for example rushes and sedges or heather and gorse. This common and widespread spider is the heaviest spider in the UK and its webs can reach 40cm across. The mated females are fat with eggs in Summer and Autumn, often giving the abdomen a distinctly circular shape. The large size



Araneus quadratus female
– Wikipedia image

helps to identify it, along with the distinctive pattern of four white spots in the front half of the abdomen and a rather vague *folium* edged with white markings. The background colour of the abdomen varies from pale yellow to bright orange, cherry-red or chocolate brown. The legs are pale brown with darker rings and numerous spines, and the *carapace* is also pale brown with darker bands to the sides bordered by a pale area that separates them from the margin.

The identification information was taken from Britain's Spiders, A Field Guide, by Lawrence Bee, Geoff Oxford and Helen Smith, published in 2017 by Princeton University Press in association with the British Arachnological Society.

Deborah Porter

Cam Valley Wildlife Egroup is no more

The egroup has served the group well since we set it up in 2003. Over the years it has provided a news facility with reminders about events and details of sightings by members. Also members could post their own photographs onto the egroup.



It also has been the home for files and information about the group such as:

- Back copies of our newsletters
- Copies of our constitution, policies and insurance cover
- Annual accounts
- Details of and reports on various projects we are running.

Over the last 12 years there has been a huge change in technology and social media available on the internet (some good and some not so good). Egroups have become rather outdated and have remained rather cumbersome to use. We have therefore decided that ours will be discontinued with immediate effect. Its interactive function is being replaced by the website's Message Boards.

As you will hopefully be aware, our old website ran into a few problems and over the past year we have been developing a new one. It is up and running and will continue to be developed for the future.

The intention is to gradually move over much of the information that was held on the egroup onto the website so that all the information will be held in one place and accessible.

Currently the website provides maps of our area, our current Events and Botany Walks programmes, a copy of the previous season's Newsletter (only members get the current newsletter), back copies of newsletters, various interest pages and the Message Boards.

The Message boards are formed by subdividing a Blog post into categories. Anyone who signs up to follow the blog via email (click 'Follow' in the purple section at the bottom of any of the website pages), will receive any messages that are posted, just like on the Members' e-group, but visitors to the website can choose to look at just one category of posts, such as *News and Announcements*, if they wish. There is one difference between the group blog and the egroup though – you can choose either to sign up as an author, like becoming an egroup member, or you can become a contributor, allowing you to compose a post for one of the site editors to post for you. If you wish to do either of these, please email camvalleywildlife@gmail.com.

There is already a lot to see of interest on the website including:

- Information on what to look out for in the wildlife year by month
- CVWG Projects descriptions and reports
- Photograph/image galleries
- Event reports
- A link to the current Bath Natural History Society programme on the Events main page
- A page where wildlife sightings are posted.

If you have not already done so we encourage you to visit the website at cvwg.org.uk and have a browse around.

Andre Fournier and Deborah Porter

A Merehead Quarry adventure

This was launched from the village of Downhead (69 46) led by Tony House of Somerset Wildlife – East Somerset group and Simon Wiltshire who is environment officer for the operating company of the quarry, Aggregates Ltd.

At about 10.30 am about 35 members and visitors (including me and two charming half size maidens hiding beneath their fancy umbrellas to combat the foul blustering and raining weather conditions - far distant from a late summer's day one hopes to expect) set off at a brisk pace along highway and bridle path until a gate was reached and duly unlocked by Simon. This enabled the group to traverse vast areas of flattened scalplings reclaimed from the quarry below. It allowed the group to advance to the viewing barrier to observe the gigantic hole in the ground, the largest quarry in Europe! I couldn't write down the statistics because the notebook would have been soggy in no time but two and a half miles across, I think was mentioned.



Moon daisies

Production is planned to cease in this part of the quarry by 2040 even though planning permission has been secured to operate to a deeper level. Landscaping will then commence. There is already a lake in the middle around which the railway runs.

The restored land areas are of low fertility, so I was not surprised to see lots of moon daisies of minute size. I also encountered a small patch of marjoram. However, the wildlife group have

been scattering flowery meadow seed mix, ready for a brighter view next year – that's if the flock of sheep don't eat the flowers!

Fergus Callander

Look out for Megachile!

Home time at Clutton School, leaf cutting bees would pop in and out of tiny tunnels in the office wall. Thirty years later I expect they still are.

Leaf cutting bees are worldwide and varied. There are 1,500 species of them compared with only 7 honey bees and 150 bumble bees. The largest bee in the world is *Megachile pluto* from Indonesia, a leaf cutter.

The most likely *Megachile* you will see in and around the Cam Valley is *Megachile willughbiella*. I have several colonies living in pots of *Sempervivum* and another in the dry stone wall next to my home. It is fascinating to watch the females as they navigate using visual clues to find their tunnels. I keep the pots in precisely the same positions otherwise it confuses the bees.



Megachile willughbiella

They carry rolled leaves to expand their nests and pollen to feed their broods. Their colour changes depending on what type of pollen they carry on their abdominal brushes.

They tunnel like tiny terriers, pushing soil backwards and kicking it away. If we enjoy an Indian summer we will continue to see bee activity before winter closes in. We can use the winter to make bee 'hotels' ready for May when *Megachile* will start expanding its range.

With 275 species of British bee, you will need an identification guide. Buglife produce a chart and Bloomsbury publishes the 'Field Guide to the Bees of Great Britain and Ireland' by Steven Falk, illustrated by the excellent Richard Lewington. The book contains over 100 pictures and 234 maps. I bought mine at Mr B's in Bath.

'Tiny' French

CVWG events programme Nov 2017 – March 2018

Wednesday 8 November 2017

Botany drinks at Prince of Wales, Peasedown St John 7.00-9.00pm. It's a chance for Botany walkers to socialise over the winter months. All are welcome.

Wednesday 22 November 2017

**Talk on Life & Times of the Brown Hare, by Peter Thompson,
Biodiversity Advisor, The Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust**

Coffee & cake from 7.30pm, talk at 8.00pm. Members £2, (non-members: £3)
At SWALLOW – see directions below.

Wednesday 6 December 2017

Talk by Diana Walker on her wildlife year, after AGM.

Seasonal refreshments from 7.30pm, followed by short AGM, then Diana will be talking about her wildlife encounters during the year.

No charge. Please also bring along your own photos from the past year.

At SWALLOW – see directions below.

Wednesday 10 January 2018

Botany drinks at Prince of Wales, Peasedown St John 7.00-9.00pm. It's a chance for Botany walkers to socialise over the winter months. All are welcome.

Wednesday 7 February 2018

Botany drinks at Prince of Wales, Peasedown St John 7.00-9.00pm. It's a chance for Botany walkers to socialise over the winter months. All are welcome.

Wednesday 21 February 2018

Talk by Dan Cragg of Bristol Zoo on their conservation work

Coffee & cake from 7.30pm, talk at 8.00pm. Members £2, (non-members: £3)

At SWALLOW – see directions below.

Wednesday 7 March 2018

Botany drinks at Prince of Wales, Peasedown St John 7.00-9.00pm. It's a chance for Botany walkers to socialise over the winter months. All are welcome.

Wednesday 14 March 2018

A talk by Marion Rayner of Bath NATS on the Natural History of Smallcombe Cemetery.

Coffee & cake from 7.30pm, talk at 8.00pm. Members £2, (non-members: £3)

At SWALLOW – see directions below

Our venue for indoor meetings:

SWALLOW, Old Engine House, Old Pit Road, Midsomer Norton, BA3 4BQ.

If coming from Midsomer Norton, go up Silver Street, turn left into Charlton Rd, then at the end go left onto **A367** towards Radstock. Go past the row of shops on the left: Fosse Way Co-op store & Whitstones fish & chip shop.

About 300 yards further, just past zebra crossing and past Buildbase on your right, **turn left at the sign for 'Sun Chemical: opposite the children's playground/bowling club.** This is a single track road - go along, road curves to the right, and just past the bend is the entrance to SWALLOW (sign on noticeboard at entrance). Go through the gateway and the meeting room is straight ahead on the far left. There is plenty of parking. Please note that Satnav may take you astray!

If you need any more information about anything please phone Judy on 07460 278311 or email judy@swallowcharity.org.

Hummingbird Hawk moth



This moth was seen in my garden in Bridge Place Road on 17th July. It revisited on several occasions

Louise Atherton

Next Newsletter: The copy date for the next Newsletter is **15th December 2017.**

**This Newsletter is published four times a year by Cam Valley Wildlife Group, an independent, volunteer-run wildlife group, covering Midsomer Norton, Radstock and surrounding villages.
To contribute articles, or provide feedback on previous articles, contact the Editor:**

**Elizabeth Brimmell, Abbots Barn Cottage, Cameley Lane, Hinton Blewett,
Bristol BS39 5AL. Email: ebrimmell@btinternet.com, Telephone: 01761 453926.
For further information, contact André on: 01761 418153, or visit our website: <https://cvwg.org.uk>**