

FEATURES

replicating such a strong and flexible material.”

Any pets? “I’m not a great fan of any pets that need to be caged, so I don’t have any pet spiders. But the ones that wander in are welcome,” says Garth. “Spiders are nothing to be scared of in this country. They don’t want to attack you. I like the ones with giant palps [*these look like giant boxing gloves, on the males*]. We had a massive one in the sink!”

Heather said casually: “A giant one dropped on me the other day when I got out of the shower, it came off my towel. That one made me jump a bit, but then it just ran off and hid.”

As I leave, a mature and quite beautiful female silver and gold stripy cross spider sails to and fro on her silk scaffold and we ponder whether she will lay her eggs before autumn turns to winter, when her short life cycle will naturally end. We’ll wait until she’s finished before we cut the plant back, promise Garth and Heather.

MORE FANS

Over in Knowle, **Ruth and David Drury** have always given affectionate human names to all the spiders they find sharing their home. They reveal: “We do it so the kids aren’t scared. We’ve done this with all insects since our kids were young. There’s no theme. Mostly old people’s names for some reason. Lots get called Barry, Fred or Bill, also Gladys, Doris and a few Brians.”

Gill Brown of Bristol



Naturalists’ Society recalled from her childhood: “I remember christening all the house spiders Maude. I’m still the go to person for rescuing them from baths.”

Rachel Heaton in Knowle said: “I never kill them. I avoid sucking them up the vacuum and always feel terrible if I walk through a web on my morning dog walks – so much work ruined in a flash. I love them.”

Sam Wiltshire recalled one seven-legged house spider on Windmill Hill, probably one of the famous *Tegenaria* species looking for a mate, which kept coming back in the house after

being gently set free in the garden, three times. “Unless there were others with the same missing leg, this one was determined about where it wanted to be!” he laughed.

Did you know Bristol even has a spider living locally that has luminous green teeth? **Susan Acton-Campbell** revealed she has seen it in the distinctive tower visible on the South Bristol skyline, towards Troopers Hill. This incredible alien tube web spider, *Segestria florentina*, has shacked up in Bristol’s industrial ruins after arriving as a stowaway on ships. “We used to find it in

WILDLIFE WATCH

STILL SCARED?

BRISTOL Zoo’s ‘Living with Spiders’ courses can help people overcome any fear. It includes four hours with relaxation, hypnotherapy and optional meetings with ‘friendly’ spiders.

A Zoo spokesperson said: “Average anxiety levels for participants during face-to-face spider encounters fell by over half after the course. Courses are on November 26 and December 23. bristolzoo.org.uk/whats-on/living-with-spiders

the crumbling mortar of the chimney. A visiting plant expert showed us how to touch the web with a blade of grass and those black legs would shoot out!”

SPIDER FRIENDS

At least one Bristol pest control company brags that “insects don’t stand a chance” and parades photos of beautiful solitary bees, spiders (which are not actually insects) and other natural wonders being demonised. Too right they don’t stand a chance! That is not a world I want to live in, although it is increasingly heading that way. Many of the invertebrates that prop up the ecosystem we depend upon are suffering severe declines due to too much intolerance of them.

* *Fans of Marvel films will know that Menace is one of the enemies of Spider-man.*

** *There’s a myth that daddy-long-legs are so venomous that they could kill people. They can’t.*



CHAMELEON CRAB SPIDER

Hiding in flowers, mature females can change colour to match the petals. South Bristol residents can find the cunning crab spider *Misumena vatia* in white, yellow or green. Males are mostly brown.

PHOTO: Mohamed Kamardine

GREEN FANGED TUBE WEB

Pictured opposite page, top The rare, iridescent green-fanged tube web spider, *Segestria florentina*, hides in a silk-lined tunnel inside old buildings around Bristol. It darts out when its silk trip wires are tugged. The spiderlings

will eat their mother when she dies. A bite from this one can feel like a prick from a needle, but nothing more serious.

PHOTO: Luis Miguel Bugallo Sánchez, Wikimedia Commons



CROSS SPIDER

The cross spider or orb-weaver *Araneus diadematus* is a common garden spider. This pretty creature has a distinctive cross on its body, often with intricate orange, brown or yellow patterns. It creates beautiful wide webs that greet you

in the morning. Egg sacs are hidden around the garden. It paralyses its prey and injects enzymes that dissolve the insect’s insides.

PHOTO: Mohamed Kamardine



UNUSUAL BAKED BEAN SPIDER

Nicknamed the ‘baked bean spider’ because of its looks, this is a *Dysdera erythrina*, spotted by Harry Mac of Bristol Naturalists’ Society. Bristol is one of a few places in Britain where it is still found. It has powerful jaws for chomping

woodlice. A similar looking species is more often found in gardens, with a redder abdomen.

PHOTO: Harry Mac



ZEBRA SPIDER

The zebra spider, *Salticus scenicus*, is a frequently found, rather cute, black and white striped resident in South Bristol gardens. Only 6-7mm long, it basks on dry, sunny places and leaps up to 10cm on prey. • *With thanks to all the Voice readers who responded to Alex’s appeal for spider-lovers, and sent us photos.*