

Book Review Editor's note: Continuing with our decision to investigate suitable websites and, if appropriate, include their reviews. I have written the following review at the suggestion

of Sandy Garland. If others know of similar suitable sites and are moved to submit a review please contact me at r.john@rogers.com.

The Nearctic Spider Database

By Database administrator, David P. Shorthouse (dshorthouse@eol.org). 2009.
http://www.canadianarachnology.org/data/canada_spiders/

This database covers Greenland, Canada, the United States, parts of Mexico, and Bermuda and states that this area includes 70 families, 674 genera, and approximately 4500 species of spiders. The contributed specimen records to date amount to just over 2000 species. The species pages are peer-reviewed [three reviews] accounts voluntarily written by araneologists and museum curators. This is not a government-funded operation, but is supported by enthusiasts willing to give their time. This also means there are no political or financial limitations. However, the database will only thrive and grow if enough participants are willing to contribute. So far there are 243 either completed or draft "species pages."

The author uses "Unique species" to indicate that he has had to reconcile some names to construct those regional tables. If the specimen record uses a synonym or old treatment of a species' name, it is lumped into an aggregate of other specimens whose nomenclature is the currently recognized nomenclature.

I tried the "Species List by Nearctic Region" which covers all provinces and states [except Vermont and Rhode Island] and plus Greenland, Mexico and Bermuda. By clicking Canada I can see the database contains 575 "unique" species against an expected 1375 or 42%. For Ontario there are 156 species against an unknown expected number.

Going to the Ontario section I get a list of the 156 species. Choosing number 20 I reach the *Argiope trifasciata* page. This gives the common name as Banded Garden Spider, a map that shows a distribution along much of southern Canada, a description of habitat and a beautiful photo of the lovely species. Some of the sections are marked as "unrecorded or unknown." There is a substantial reference section.

Moving to the *Argiope aurantia* [Yellow Garden Spider] page there is a similarly lovely photograph and the same level of information as the previous species, plus line drawings giving male and female dimensions.

The data can be accessed in a number of ways: by province or state, by species, by descriptions or by images. On 23 May 2006, in Ottawa I saw a spider about 1.5 cm long, very compact with thick limbs, the front was shiny, polished black and the abdomen was soft buff with a dark brown centre stripe. With John Acorn's help I identified it as *Phidippus johnsoni* – the Johnson jumper. I tried the database's search mechanism for *Phidippus* and *Phidippus johnsoni* and it worked very well. There is a very fine photo of this impressive species. I was surprised, however, to find

Phidippus johnsoni is not listed for Ontario, only in Alberta and British Columbia. If this is a new record I unfortunately have no proof, as I was going down the highway at 100 km/h with the spider running back and forth along my dash before jumping to my knee and disappearing!

Nothing is mentioned of the venom hazard from *Latrodectus mactans*, the Southern Black Widow, nor *Latrodectus variolus*, the Northern Black Widow. This latter species is not shown as being in Canada. Even more odd *Latrodectus bishopi*, the Red Widow, who's range is given as "USA" only, whereas the Bug Guide [<http://bugguide.net/node/view/15740>] says it is found primarily in sand-pine scrub habitats in central and southeast Florida, specifically from Marion County to Martin County. [Other useful websites are <http://www.spiderwebwatch.org> and <http://forum.canadianarachnology.org>]

There is a useful glossary of spider terms.

It is soon clear that there is much to be learned about our spiders at all levels. I noted that three species are listed for Nunavut and 27 for the Northwest Territories. This, I am sure, can be attributed to much better access [by scientists] by road, water and rail. Similarly Alberta's 416 species vastly outshines Saskatchewan's 45 and Manitoba's 46. There are numerous gaps at all technical levels. Only a portion of the species are illustrated and not all of these are field photos [some are of museum specimens]. The most information is on the common species like *Araneus diadematus*, Cross orbweaver, which I know as that long-time, plump friend the Garden Spider.

One obvious lack is the absence of a common name for many species. Several years ago the dragonfly enthusiast began developing common names for the odonates as a way of raising their popularity. Maybe this needs to be done for spiders too!

The Nearctic Spider Database is another very useful tool for amateurs and professionals alike. It will clearly grow and increase in value with time. It opens a door for serious contributions in many areas of spider biology. My grandchildren repeatedly "squirt" me with spider web in imitation of Spiderman. Recently I suffered the same two-finger "fate" in Niuaotupapu, a remote island in Tonga – so Spiderman has huge influence. Surely there are some new araneologists in the making in this world!

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