

Newsletter of the African Arachnological Society



This is the newsletter of the African Arachnological Society (AFRAS). The aim of AFRAS is to foster interest in arachnids (non-Acari) of the African continent.

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Shortly after Robin Lyle's appointment as the new collections manager / curator of the Transvaal Museum Invertebrate collections, Dr. Ansie Dippenaar-Schoeman asked her to take over the reigns as editor for the AFRAS newsletter. Ansie is currently swamped with the overwhelming numbers of specimens and work generated by the South Africa National Survey of Arachnida (SANSA).

NEWS FROM THE NEW EDITOR

2009 has proved to be a very busy and full year for many in the AFRAS world. Numerous research projects and fieldwork trips have been carried out by various institutions, as you will soon see.

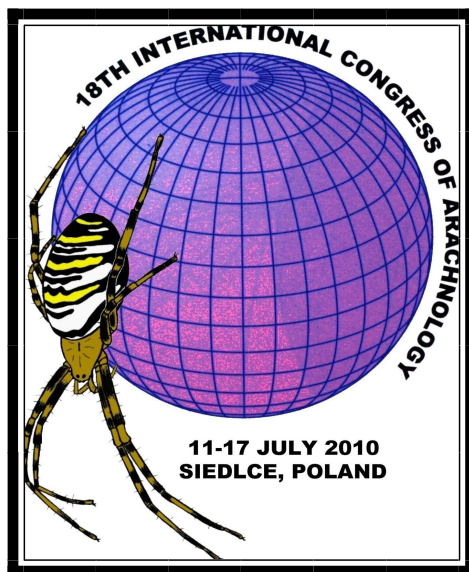
As the new editor of the AFRAS newsletter, I hope to successfully fill the shoes of Ansie and her team, which took the newsletter from strength to strength.

Since the last newsletter and the introduction of the new logo, the new website has been launched. The new website is looking very good thanks to a lot of work put in by the AFRAS chairman, Charles Haddad.

The AFRAS website link is: <http://afras.ufs.ac.za>. Please free to visit the website and make suggestions!

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18TH INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF ARACHNOLOGY



The 18th International Arachnology Congress is going to held in Siedlce, Poland from the 11th to the 17th July 2010. The congress will be returning to Europe after being held in São Pedro, Brazil. The Academy of Podlasie will be the host for this congress and the congress will be held on the campus grounds. The organisers are promising a congress that will not only be interesting scientifically, but socially as well. Topics at the congress are varied, covering wide range of interests.

Please visit the website for regular updates at <http://www.arachnologia.edu.pl/congress.html> or contact the organisers at marekzabka@ap.siedlce.pl or patoleta@ap.siedlce.pl

INSTITUTIONAL NEWS

ARC-PPRI BIOSYSTEMATICS DIVISION

The long planned relocation of the ARC-PPRI Biosystematics Division took place during October/November last year. Both staff and the natural history collections were relocated to the new ARC facility at Roodeplaat. The new biosystematic division houses the National Collections of the Arachnida, Fungi, Insects and Nematodes, all in a single building.

The move temporarily affected their services. Please note that the email address and the postal address remain the same, but for now they have no telephones installed. These will be installed shortly, and their contact details will be circulated to the society's members.

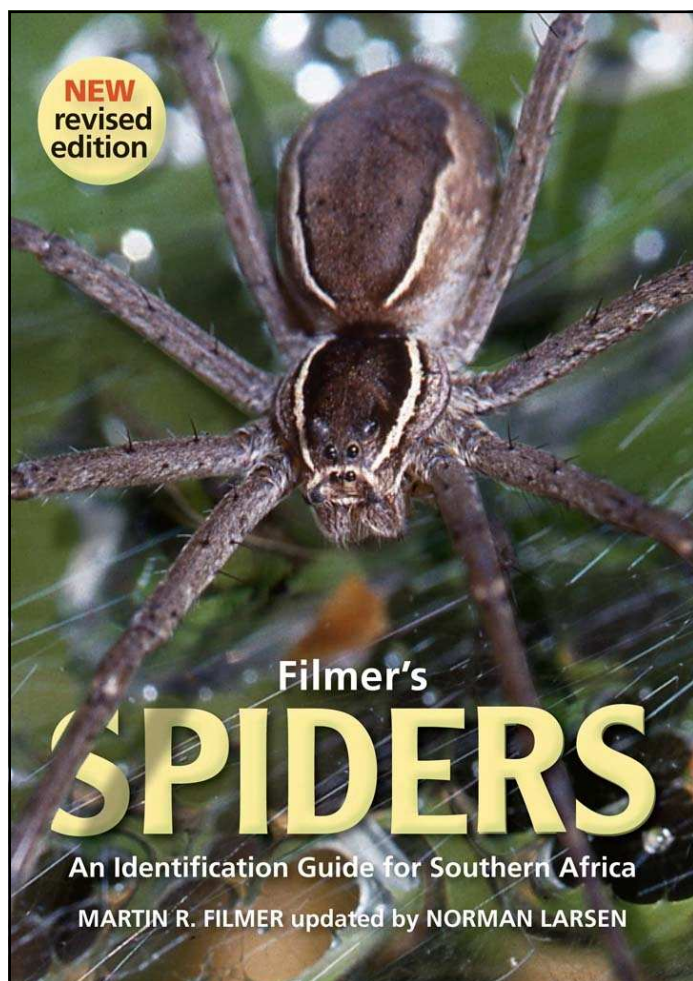
The building itself and facilities are amazing and are a drastic improvement on those at Rietondale. The Arachnida section has a room for live spiders, a washing room, and a huge room to house the collection. The new collection room couldn't have come a better time with all the new specimens being processed for the SANSA project.



SPIDERS AT IZIKO

This year has been a busy year for Norman Larsen, an associate arachnologist at the Iziko, South African Museum.

- The revision of the late Dr Martin Filmer's book took up much of the year and is now almost complete, and will hopefully be out by Easter 2010. The text has been increased by 20-25% and includes images included on the text pages. The book will be in the same format and number of pages but, unfortunately, will have the text in a smaller type font.
- Work will continue on the Catalogue of Spiders of the Cape Peninsula, which is a collaboration with Dr. Ansie Dippenaar. Progress has been slower than hoped but the catalogue should be completed during the next year.
- An educational display with ten spider tanks was exhibited at the Cape Union Mart Adventure Centre at Canal Walk. It convinced hundreds of Cape Townians to see spiders and arachnids in a new light. Norman personally spoke to people visiting the displays on Saturday and Sunday mornings. The 10th anniversary of the Volunteer Fire Fighters of the Table Mountain National Park provided an opportunity for Norman to change more attitudes and promote spiders.
- Various lectures were presented throughout the year, which included a lecture presented to the Friends of Kenilworth Race Course. The 52 hectare Kenilworth Racecourse Conservation Area is regarded as the best example of Sand Plain Fynbos on the Cape Peninsula and is one of the few habitats that have the endangered Micro frog *Microbatrachella capensis*. Sampling of the race course has produced numerous interesting species including the undescribed male of *Argiope aurocincta*.



Revised Filmer's Spider Book which will soon be available

INSTITUTIONAL NEWS

SPIDERS AT IZIKO

- Regular outings took place throughout the year into Newlands Forest to observe *Avellopsis capensis*. This area still produces many surprises, including a third species of *Arachnura* that was unfortunately taken by a wasp while maturing in Norman's garden. This species occurs elsewhere as there is an illustration of it in John and Astri Leroy's book. All Norman's images were lost when his hard drive crashed. The second species will be illustrated in the revised Filmer spider book.
- A comprehensive article on spider envenomation, including controversial aspects and hoax emails, was written by Norman. Dr Gerbus Muller is currently checking it before it goes onto the museums biodiversity explorer web site. A snake bite article will follow. The biodiversity explorer web site <http://www.biodiversityexplorer.org/arachnids/> must, at some time, be updated and expanded.
- Any researchers and any enthusiasts doing surveys in the Western Cape Province are invited to contact Norman to coordinate projects. Please contact him at his email: avellopsis@telkomsa.net.



Araneidae, *Argriope aurocincta* ♂
Photograph by N. Larsen



Website: <http://www.iziko.org.za/sam/index.html>

The collection manager of the arachnid collection at the museum is Mrs. M. Cochrane (mcochrane@iziko.org.za).

NATIONAL MUSEUM, BLOEMFONTEIN



Leon Lotz has been busy with a number of ongoing revisions in the Afrotropical Region. The first is the still ongoing *Cheiracanthium* and *Cheiramiona* (Araneae: Miturgidae) revision, the second is the revision of the Archaeidae, and the third a revision of the Afrotropical Sicariidae.

Additionally, numerous public talks were presented with the audience ranging from the SA Defence Force, to the Langenhoven Park Library and to Honourary Nature Conservators. These talks have helped to increase the awareness and knowledge of arachnids in

TRANSVAAL MUSEUM



This is the first of hopefully many more contributions from the Transvaal Museum, which has been relatively quiet in the past few years. Robin Lyle was recently appointed as the new collection manager / curator for the Invertebrate collections, where she is mainly in charge of the Lower Invertebrate collection (includes arachnids) and General Entomology.

This year has proven to be a busy one for her. The arachnid collection, especially the scorpion collection, is in need of attention, a task that has been tackled head on along with learning the ins and outs of collection management.

Currently she is working on publishing her masters degree research, which she completed at the University of the Free State under Charles Haddad. The first paper, a new genus of Corinnidae called *Planochelas*, has been published in the Annals of the Transvaal Museum. A second paper should be submitted shortly, titled A revision of the tracheline sac spider genus *Cetonana* Strand, 1929 in the Afrotropical Region, with descriptions of two new genera (Araneae: Corinnidae). Since the completion of her masters degree a number of additional new species have been included.

Further research will include revisions of some of the Idiopidae genera in the Afrotropical Region, along with Red Data Listing assessments for each, which will form part of Robin's future PhD project.

Please feel free to contact Robin on her email Robin@nfi.museum or the telephone number for the museum +2712 322 7632, with any queries about the collections or other related topics.

INSTITUTIONAL NEWS



Display of the month featuring the family Araneidae from the Magnificent Eight poster

UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE,
BLOEMFONTEIN

- During 2009 work continued on the systematics of Afrotropical Corinnidae as part of Charles Haddad's Ph.D study and various collaborative projects. Amongst the Castianeirinae forming the focus of his work, and paper on the Afrotropical *Medmassa* (in collaboration with Jan Bosselaers, Belgium) was recently accepted for publication and papers on *Echinax* and *Messapus* will be submitted soon. The revisions of *Cambalida*, *Apochinomma* and *Copa* continue. A new monotypic genus of Corinnidae *incertae sedis* (*Vendaphaea*) was described from the Soutpansberg Mountains in South Africa, including material collected during the last AFRAS colloquium held at Lajuma.

- Since completing her M.Sc, Robin Lyle has joined the Northern Flagship Institute – Transvaal Museum as the wet collection curator, and has continued her research on the Trachelinae of the region. As part her research, a fifth new genus from the region (*Planochelas*) was described by Robin and Charles for three species from Central and West Africa. The endemic South African genus *Austrachelas* was also revised and seven new species were added. Thanks to collaborative inputs by Jan Bosselaers (Belgium) and Martín Ramírez (Argentina), valuable SEM images and a comprehensive cladistic analysis were performed, resulting in the transfer of *Austrachelas* to Gallieniellidae. The revision of the Afrotropical *Cetonana* will be submitted for publication soon, in which two new genera will be described to accommodate the African species. Robin is continuing work on new species of *Trachelas*, *Thysanina* and *Spinotrachelas* and results will be published in due course.

- René Fourie completed her M.Sc study and is presently awaiting the examiners reports. The study focused on spider ecology in the Erfenis Dam Nature Reserve in South Africa, but also included a revision of the African purse-web spiders (Atypidae: *Calommata*), of which a new species was collected in the reserve. As part of the revision, René visited the Royal Museum for Central Africa in Tervuren to examine their material. Considering the general rarity of these spiders, MRAC has a very extensive collection of more than 40 depositories! Rudy Jocqué is collaborating on this study and assisted René with the preparation of material and took SEM photos of three species. Apart from *C. simoni*, previously regarded as the only species occurring in the region, four new species have been discovered and *C. transvaalica* (currently a synonym of *C. simoni*) will be revalidated. Males of all six species have been discovered but only females of the two latter species are known. The revision will be submitted for publication during 2010.



The male of *Planochelas botulus* Lyle & Haddad, 2009.



René Fourie out in the field.

UNIVERSITY OF VENDA



UNIVERSITY
OF VENDA



The team at the University of Venda have been busy in 2009. A number of surveys were carried out throughout the year, the first being at the Blouberg and Makgabeng plateau in March 2009. The next survey was carried out at Atherstone Nature Reserve (November 2009) in the south-western corner of the Limpopo Province. The sites were very different in terrain and vegetation. The Blouberg survey was more intensive, where the team had to climb to almost all their sites, and habitats differed in extreme (forest vs. desert). Atherstone's vegetation varied in a much more subtle way. The reserve is on the edge of the Kalahari with a few isolated patches of Kalahari sand to the west. The vegetation gently meandered between mixed woodland (*Combretum apiculatum*) on grayish loam to acacia woodlands on black peat. It was in the latter habitat that they observed several *Ceratogyrus darlingi* (horned baboon spider) burrows and proceeded to collect some specimens. The mixed woodland produced some of the highest densities of bark spiders (*Caerostris* sp.) that they had ever come across, but golden-ORB web spiders were nowhere to be found. The scorpions were also conspicuous in their absence and only two *Opisthophthalmus* specimens were collected in the pitfall traps.

Long-term monitoring of the Soutpansberg altitudinal transect is now in full throttle. The first comprehensive survey of the transect in September 2009 produced further specimens of the zodariid *Australutica africana* Jocqué 2008.

INSTITUTIONAL NEWS

THERAPHOSID RESEARCH

Richard Gallon from the UK, who has been working on African theraphosids has finalized and submitted his large paper on the group. The paper includes the description of *Idiothele mira* sp. n. (Blue Foot), a new RSA *Harpactirella* sp. and the description of the male of *Ceratogyrus paulseni*, to mention a few interesting points. He has been told that the publication will be released in 2010.

Not only has he been busy with the large revision, he has also submitted an additional paper which describes a new genus of Theraphosidae from Angola.

Contact Richard at postmaster@zezz.demon.co.uk

NEW NEPHILA SPECIES FOR SOUTHERN AFRICA AND MADAGASCAR – THE LARGEST IN THE WORLD

Citation: Kuntner M, Coddington JA (2009) Discovery of the Largest Orb Weaving Spider Species: The Evolution of Gigantism in *Nephila*. *PLoS ONE* 4(10): e7516. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0007516

This paper is freely available on line at www.plosone.org.

The amazing new species named *Nephila komaci*, which was described by the researchers Matjaz Kuntner and Jonathan A. Coddington. The species was named to honour Kuntner's late friend Andrej Komac.

The paper described the first new *Nephila* to be discovered since 1879. The paper describes the renown of *Nephila* as being the largest web-spinning spiders, making the largest orb webs, and their being model organisms for the study of extreme sexual size dimorphism and sexual biology. In studying the new species in relation to the known species, the authors concluded that *Nephila* females increased in size almost monotonically to establish a mostly African clade of true giants. *Nephila* male size hovers around values roughly one fifth of female size. Therefore the males are also large but in proportion to the females are not exceptionally so.

A specimen was housed in the national collection at PPRI in Pretoria, having been collected at Sodwana Bay in 1977-78 (Now the paratype.) It had been incorrectly identified as *Nephila inaurata madagascariensis*. Charles Haddad collected a female in Tembe Elephant Park in July 2004, and a male in the same location in 2002. The authors thanked Charles Haddad for recognising the importance of the new material and for sharing field data.

Insert provided by Dr. Ansie Dippenaar-Schoeman.

ROYAL MUSEUM FOR CENTRAL AFRICA

- Rudy Jocqué is planning a trip to Ivory Coast in order to initiate the study of the spider fauna of the Tai National Park. This is the largest forest in West Africa but virtually nothing is known of its spider fauna. Moussa Diarassouba of the University of Cocody (Abidjan) will use the study to make a PhD on the fauna of that forest.

- Wouter Fannes continues his work on Afrotropical Oonopidae for his PhD.

- Arnaud Henrard has finished his master's dissertation on canopy dwelling *Orchestina* from Africa. His work can be consulted on the website of the PBI.

- Domir De Bakker has left the museum but is determined to finish his PhD on the canopy fauna of the afrotropics.

- Wim Desnijder from the "Katholieke Hogeschool Zuid-West Vlaanderen" is doing a practical exercise job, where he compiled all the information available on Afrotropical *Mallinella* (Zodariidae). He has photographed all species available in the RMCA collections and is currently preparing an identification key for all described species. Thus far it appears that the African representatives are off to a flimsy start.

- Benoit Nzigidahera from Burundi (INECN, Institut national de exploitation et conservation de la Nature) received a four month grant to finish his PhD on the mountain spider fauna of his country. The first paper on the genus *Zelotibia* appeared in 2009. Several more papers on Zodariidae, Linyphiidae and Agelenidae are in preparation.

- Luis Crespo from the University of Coimbra has attended a three week course on the identification of Afrotropical spiders, focusing on collections from Guinea Bissau and Ethiopia.

- Jean-Louis Juakaly (University of Kisangani, Congo DR) has received a UNESCO grant to write a proposal for the study of the spider fauna in the forests of Central Africa and spent two months at the RMCA in this context. The focus of the studies will be on the resilience of the spider fauna of the Central African forest. Jean Louis will take part in the large Congo-River expedition 2010 that will run from April to June this year. Over a distance of almost 1500 km samples will be taken by a variety of collecting techniques including canopy fogging.

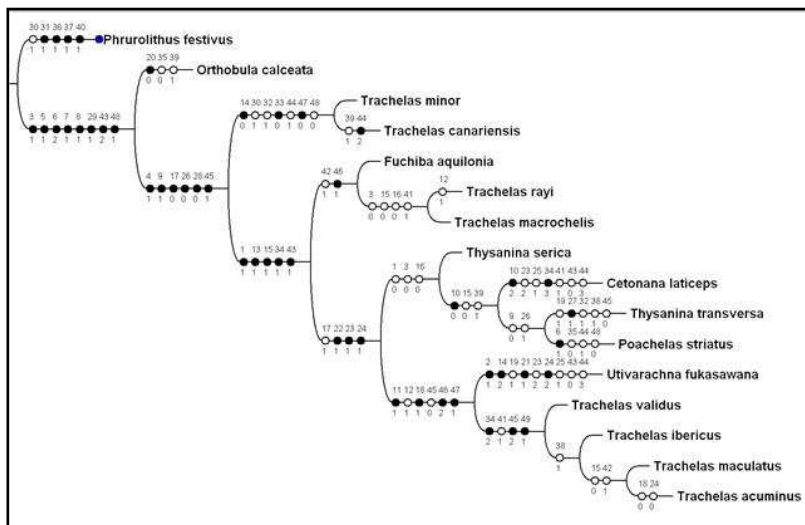
Just a quick reminder of the Magnificent 8 poster, which can be ordered from Sma Mathebula at MathebulaC@arc.agric.za

INSTITUTIONAL NEWS

CORINNID RESEARCH

Russian researchers, M. Kovblyuk & A. Nadoniy, recently described a new tracheline genus *Paratrachelas*. Jan Bosse-laers has prepared a small scale cladistic analysis of Trachelinae (right) in which it can clearly be seen that the Palearctic *Trachelas* species fall apart into three monophyletic groups, and that the monophyly of *Paratrachelas* (i.e. *Trachelas maculatus* and *T. acuminus*) is supported rather well. Jan is currently describing a new Mediterranean species of *Paratrachelas* with his Belgian colleague Robert Bosmans.

Jan hopes to do a future collaboration with Charles Haddad and analyse the relationships of the Trachelinae worldwide, particularly to resolve the status of the genera *Trachelas* and *Cetonana*, which are polyphyletic.



SALTICID RESEARCH

Wanda Wesolowska had a very busy 2009, with numerous publications describing new Salticidae from the Afrotropical Region (see publications list).

Her revision of the genus *Nigorella* (Araneae: Salticidae) is very impressive. The genus *Nigorella* was established by Wesolowska & Tomasiewicz in 2008 for *Nigorella aethiopica*. This genus, besides the type species, consists only three species. Two of them were originally described as *Phileus manicus* and *Pachypoessa albimana* and were later considered conspecific and subsequently synonymized with *Euophrys plebeja*. However, as the synonymization is invalid, these names have been restored from synonymy, and after revision they regain the status of valid species.

A new species of *Nigorella*, *N. hirsuta*, was described from several localities in South Africa and Zimbabwe, while *N. albimana* has a widespread distribution in Western and Central Africa. Two species, namely, *N. aethiopica* and *N. manica* are only known from their types localities.



Nigorella hirsuta with ventral view of palp.

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AZARKINA G.N. 2009. Two new species of the genus *Aelurillus* Simon, 1885 (Araneae, Salticidae) from Africa. *Journal of Afrotropical Zoology* 5: 171–177.

AZARKINA G.N. 2009. A brief note on Gambian jumping spiders (Araneae, Salticidae). *Newsletter of the British Arachnological Society* 114: 7–8.

BAREJ, M.F., WURSTNER, J.A.M. & BÖHME, W. 2009. Predation on the treefrog *Leptopelis brevirostris* (Anura: Arthroleptidae) by a wandering spider (Araneae: Ctenidae) in Cameroon. *Herpetology Notes* 2: 137–139.

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- CROSS, F.R. & JACKSON, R.R. 2009. Odour-mediated response to plants by *Evarcha culicivora*, a blood-feeding jumping spider from East Africa. *New Zealand Journal of Zoology* 36: 75–80.
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- HILL, D.E. & RICHMAN, D.B. 2009. The evolution of jumping spiders (Araneae: Salticidae): a review. *Peckhamia* 75: 1–7.
- HUFF, J.C. & PRENDINI, L. 2009. On the African whip scorpion, *Etiennus africanus* (Hentschel, 1899) (Thelyphonida: Thelyphonidae), with a redescription based on new material from Guinea-Bissau and Senegal. *American Museum Novitates* 3658: 1–16.
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NEWS SNIPPETS

ARACHNOLOGISTS UNITE AND MEET ON FACEBOOK

In addition to the new AFRAS website, a number of social networking groups have emerged on the social network FaceBook. For arachnologists a few groups of interest included:

ArachnoScience: <http://www.facebook.com/#/group.php?gid=151977353166&ref=ts>



Arachnologists Unite: <http://www.facebook.com/#/group.php?gid=2321784487&ref=ts>

Transvaal Museum: <http://www.facebook.com/#/group.php?gid=103364613884&ref=ts>

Please feel free to take a peak at these groups. Please note that you have to join FaceBook as a member to access these links.



http://venomous-spiders.nanders.dk/pictures/Phidippus_regis.jpg

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