

BRITISH ARACHNOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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A SHORT HISTORY OF OUR SOCIETY

by G.H.LOCKET.

It is just ten years since the Flatford Mill Spider Group came into being and in view of its impending second metamorphosis from the British Spider Study Group to the British Arachnological Society, this seems to be an occasion for putting on record a short history of the Group and for paying tribute to our Honorary Secretary, with whose name it will always be associated.

It is probable that Mr. David Mackie would have formed a spider group anyhow, but it so happened that it came about as the result of a series of courses run by the Field Studies Council, and it was the Warden of Flatford Mill, Mr.F.J.Bingley, who first suggested to Dr.A.F. Millidge and myself in 1953 that spiders could be the subject of a field studies course. At the invitation of the late Mr. Paul Holmes I tried my hand at this in August 1954 at Malham Tarn Field Centre and there I first met Mr.Mackie. I will only say that from the moment he arrived, some two days later than the rest, the course began to go with a swing and it was a very happy party which explored during that week the possibilities of meetings of this kind. The result was encouraging enough to warrant the acceptance of an invitation from Mr.Bingley to attempt a second course at Flatford Mill in 1956. This showed definitely that group study of spiders would be feasible and further courses run by Dr.A.D.Blest, Mr.D.J.Clark and Dr.J.A.L.Cooke followed. On the last evening of the 1958 course (which I had taken over at short notice because Dr.Blest went to Panama that year) Mr.Mackie arranged an informal discussion in the laboratory and suggested that those present might form a small study group and try to keep in contact. He agreed to act as secretary for the group and I was very much honoured when they asked me to be their first president. The members of this original group were: J.Gurr, R.B.Coleman, J.E.Hudson, P.M.Pollak, W.F.Cook, J.M.Cherrett, C.I.Carter, Miss Una Dalton, D.W.Mackie and G.H.Locket and the late Mr. R.Prichard.

The production of a regular Bulletin from early 1959 for the recording of observations, events and general articles assured the success and stability of the Group from its beginning and it has been the growth and steady improvement of the contributions to the Bulletin that account for the Group's reputation and importance both in this country and abroad. For this the credit again goes to Mr.Mackie who assumed the function of editor in addition to his other duties, and it is to his judgement and selection of matter submitted, as well as his willingness to devote himself to the arduous business of typing (correctly!), duplicating and posting copies to the ever increasing number of Members that we owe so much. Editorial policy soon resulted in a balance of the Bulletin contents. On the one hand articles of definite scientific interest and importance have increased in number and yet, on the other

hand, space has always been found for notes by Members of their experiences in collecting, arranging and recording and so forth if these were likely to interest other Members.

By 1964 the business of the Group had become such that it was thought advisable to collect together an 'ad hoc' committee which could meet once a year and discuss policy and any problems of administration and liason that arose. Those asked to attend were: Messrs. D.J.Clark, J.A.L.Cooke, J.Crocker, E.Duffey, G.H.Locket, D.W.Mackie, P.Merrett, A.F.Millidge, J.R.Parker and I.M.Evans as Reprint Librarian. The first meeting was held at Stratford-on-Avon, where Mr.J.R.Parker arranged for us to stay. Subsequent meetings were held at Stratford in 1965 and, at Dr.Duffey's invitation, at the Monks Wood Experimental Station of the Nature Conservancy in 1966, 1967 and 1968.

From the beginning of these meetings, some members felt that the Group was sufficiently well established to require a constitution which would enable all Members to have their views represented by an elected governing council which would replace the 'ad hoc' self appointed committee. The working out of such a constitution to lay before the membership naturally took a good deal of thought, time and effort, for it was not a thing that could be done in a hurry, but at the beginning of 1969 it is intended that the Group will have become the British Arachnological Society with its own constitution.

Such in brief is the history of the Group, but a word on the policy and intentions of those who founded it may not be out of place. It was their intention that not only would they do all they could to facilitate the study of spiders, but that they would keep in personal contact as far as possible, and, as amateurs, enjoy each other's company and the great pleasure to be had from the discussion of common interests and activity. It was therefore to be expected that the Members who had some knowledge of spiders would avail themselves of the opportunities presented by a series of courses at Malham Tarn, run by Dr.Duffey (1960, 1961 and 1962) which illustrated practically some present day ecological methods and which not only proved exceedingly interesting but produced results of significance and gave direction and importance to our enthusiasm. Surveys of dune areas at Whiteford (Glamorgan) in 1964, 1965 and 1967, at Tentsmuir (Fife) in 1966 and at Winterton (Norfolk) in 1968, under the auspices of the Nature Conservancy, followed and practiced Members of the Group were able to contribute to results of scientific importance and to gain valuable experience in doing so. In the meantime those who had fewer opportunities and were less experienced were not out of Mr.Mackie's mind and under his guidance, one week field meetings were arranged at York (with Mr.Clifford Smith) in 1965 and further courses at Monks Wood (1966), Malham Tarn (1967) and Juniper Hall (1968). One day field meetings have also been held at Box Hill and Chobham (led by Mrs.F.Murphy) and at Delamere and Ainsdale. All gave opportunities for contacts and encouragement for beginners and the results of these activities have been recorded in the Bulletin.

The Group now starts a new phase under a name which will involve it in much responsibility and its future success will require the same devotion from its officers as that given without stint by its founder,

secretary and editor. "Success" to him has meant not only scientific achievement but also the making and keeping of personal contacts between Members and the encouragement of all sorts of joint social ventures. That he has decided that the time has now come for him to seek a well earned rest we must regret, but we may be assured that he will not cease to be a very active Member and to contribute for many a year to the continuing success of the enterprise he started ten years ago.

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A PRELIMINARY STUDY OF

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THE LIFE HISTORY OF SITPICUS FLORICOLA (C.L.KOCH).

by A.M.WILD.

Introduction. In 1957 (1) I published a small note on an observed case of longevity of spermatozoa in Sitticus floricola (C.L.Koch). This phenomenon was noted during an attempt to make a study of the life history of this species (which was recorded in diary form). There are gaps in the story but twelve years have now passed and I see little chance of completing the work myself. I have therefore reported my preliminary findings in this article. The whole account is set down more or less as it appeared in my spider diary, quite informally and in a verbose manner. To have made a formal paper of it would have necessitated rehashing my notes, attempting to identify the spider's food, etc. For this, I could not find the time and I therefore ask for the reader's tolerance. I have to thank Mr. Mackie for much help in getting these notes ready for publication.

On 27th May 1956 an adult male and a sub-adult female of Sitticus floricola (C.L.Koch) were collected at the Nunsmere area of Delamere Forest, Cheshire. These were placed in separate 2" x  $\frac{1}{2}$ " glass tubes along with a little moss and a cottongrass head (Eriophorum sp.). The tubes were closed by a moist cotton wool plug. On the 26th June the female became adult and she accepted small house flies and also fruit flies.

On 27th June the male was introduced into the tube with the female. The male could not at first see the female because of the grass and moss being in the way, but he became immediately aware of her presence. He vibrated the legs and abdomen violently, 'drummed' with his palps and kept turning around, presumably not wishing to be taken unawares by the female. As soon as he sighted her, he reared up slightly and extended his front pair of legs stiffly upwards and outwards, quickly lowering them and raising them again. Then he began walking about with jerky vibrating steps, gradually approaching closer to her. Once, when she appeared to be frightened and began to back away, he reassured her by signalling again with his front legs and violently vibrating his abdomen. When he was about an inch and a half away she moved a little towards him, with her own front legs stretched out but much less noticeably than in the case of the male. Without hesitation, the male advanced and touched her with extended front legs, and then 'tickled' her. He mounted her (via the side of the abdomen) facing in the opposite direction and vibrated his abdomen violently from time to time. He applied his palps