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A fossil crab spider from Pliocene sediments in Western Alaska

A recent paper (Leech & Matthews, 1971) describes the fossil cymbium and palpal organ of a Thomisid spider, which is named *Xysticus archaeopalpus*. It was found in Alaska in peat beds which were overlaid by basalt during the Pliocene period and dated, by the potassium-argon method, to 5.7 million years ago. Yet this palp requires care to distinguish it from *X. britcheri* Gertsch inhabiting that region today!

Accompanying plant and insect fossils show that the environment in which the spider lived was a "shrubby opening within a forest dominated by *Picea* and *Betula*, but containing also *Pinus*, *Tsuga* and *Corylus*", quite different from the tundra occurring there today.

The authors raise the questions: was *X. archaeopalpus* the progenitor of *X. britcheri*? Were they both existing in the Pliocene? Has *X. archaeopalpus* become extinct or does it still exist thereabouts, yet to be rediscovered?

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