

## The discovery of *Oecobius annulipes* Lucas in Britain

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### Introduction

An adult male spider of unusual appearance was recently discovered on a wall in the Entomology Department of the British Museum (Natural History). It was identified as an oecobiid by Mr F. R. Wanless of the Arachnida section who had previously collected a male oecobiid within the museum in 1972, and had seen other specimens more recently in a packing case. These previous sightings had been assumed to be separate introductions. Several further adults of both sexes have now been collected and it is clear that a sizable colony is in existence, probably originating from an introduction prior to the original capture five years ago.

During examination of the museum collection of Oecobiidae a male specimen was found in the Jackson collection labelled by him (tentatively) as *Oecobius cellariorum* (Dugès). Jackson's specimen was sent to him by L. A. Carr and collected "from a greenhouse at Lichfield". It is known that Jackson corresponded with Carr, a hymenopterist, between about 1915 and 1924, but Jackson apparently never published his record of *Oecobius*.

Comparison of all the British material of Oecobiidae with named foreign specimens in the museum collection and also with the figures given by Shear (1970) indicates beyond doubt that they all belong to one species, *Oecobius annulipes* Lucas, 1846.

### Taxonomic background

The Oecobiidae are small spiders separable from all other families by the possession of a cribellum and calamistrum and a large two-jointed anal tubercle with a double fringe of curved hairs. Shear (1970) has reviewed all the species occurring in North America, Mexico and the West Indies, some of which are also found widely in the warmer parts of the Old World,

and he describes and figures the diagnostic characters. There are two genera, *Oecobius* and *Platoecobius*, the latter monotypic and restricted to Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina.

*Oecobius annulipes*, the most widespread species in the genus, is known from North and South America, Africa, Europe, Asia, and many oceanic islands. The species occurs most commonly in houses and is believed to have been spread by human agency. In North America it is found as far north as Lake Ontario. The following description is based on British specimens.

### Description

*Length*: ♂♀ 2-2.5 mm. *Carapace*: Fig. 1. Pale olivaceous brown with variable dark markings, rounded sides and projecting subtriangular clypeus. Head region somewhat raised, ocular area a little wider than long. *Eyes*: Closely grouped in two procurved rows. Anterior medians and posterior laterals round and dark, anterior laterals light and oval, posterior medians light, elongated, irregular. *Abdomen*: ♀ (Fig. 1) with variable black pattern on buff background with white subcutaneous pigment granules; ♂ with less distinct or no black markings; both sexes uniformly clothed with hairs. Posterior spinnerets elongated; anal tubercle well developed with double ring of long curved hairs. *Sternum*: Heart shaped, sparsely hairy; in ♂ lateral and posterior margins with long clavate hairs. *Legs*: Long, thin, sparsely spined, pale brown with distinct annulations in ♀, less distinct in ♂. *Epigyne*: Fig. 2. Longer than wide, with scape. *Male palp*: Figs. 3-5. *Web*: Round sheet, white, 30 mm diameter on flat surfaces or in corners, often appearing star-shaped. The spiders have been found on walls, desks, and floors, and run very fast when disturbed.

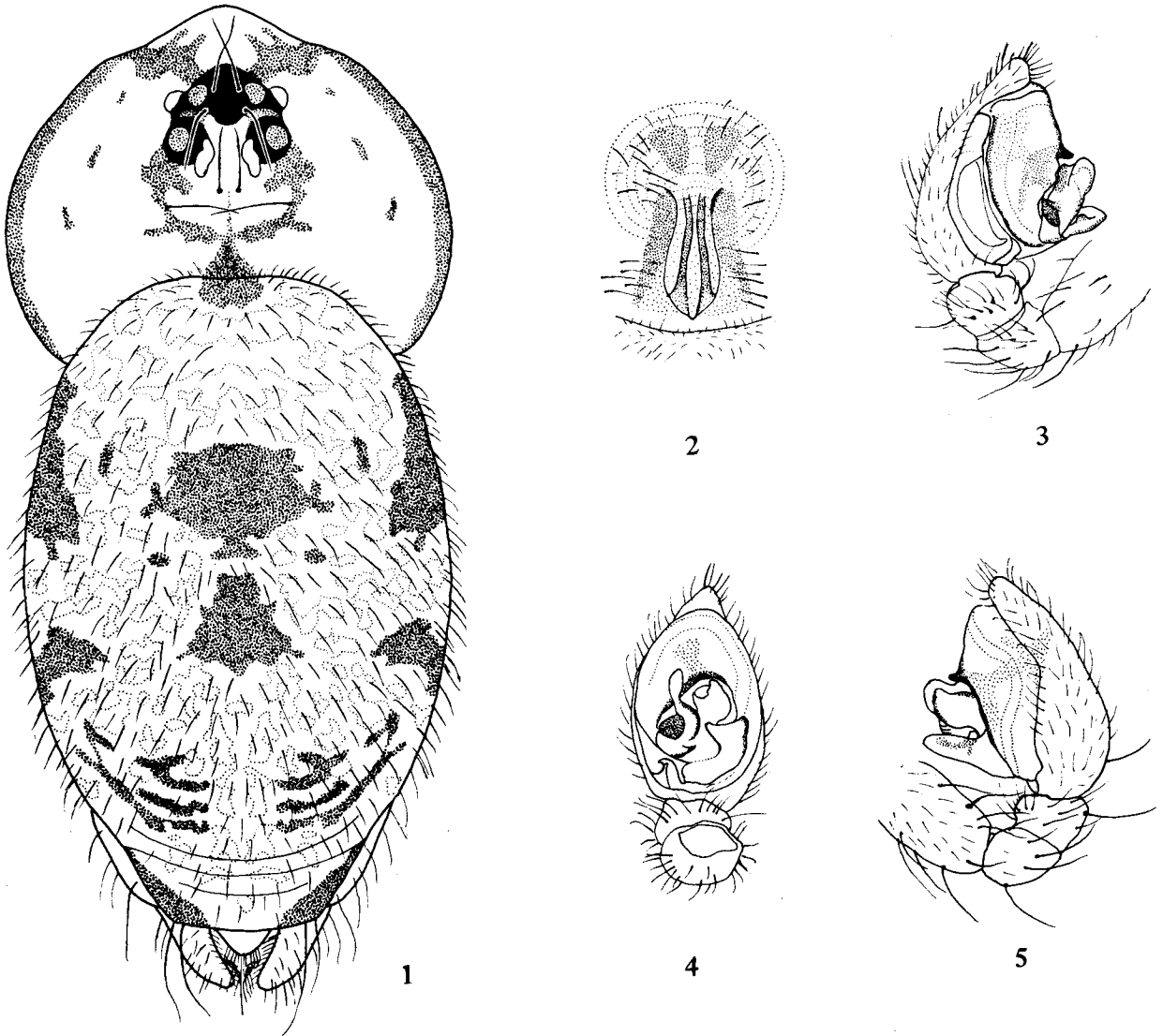
### Discussion

*Oecobius annulipes* has achieved an almost ubiquitous global distribution by human agency. Its previous apparent absence from Britain is perhaps more surprising than the fact that it has now been found. Recently, Locket *et al.* (1974) have removed six species from the British list on the grounds that because they are only established in hot houses or

banana warehouses and not "in the open air", they cannot be "regarded as part of our natural fauna". This is clearly true of hot-house species, but those which live in houses (e.g. *Herpyllus blackwalli*, *Theridion melanurum*), though subject to less extreme climatic fluctuations than outside, are not in an entirely controlled environment. Such synanthropic species are as "natural" a component of any

fauna as man himself.

In the case of *Oecobius* it remains to be seen whether more than one breeding population has been successfully established in Britain. The purpose of this note is to alert British arachnologists to the presence of this small and inconspicuous domestic immigrant, in the hope that further reports will be forthcoming.



Figs. 1-5: *Oecobius annulipes* Lucas. 1 Female carapace and abdomen, dorsal; 2 Epigyne; 3-5 Male palp, right; 3 Lateral; 4 Ventral; 5 Mesal.

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**References**

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