

Spiders Share Space

March 2005

Three different kinds of spider have taken up residence in the same space among the low shrubs in our garden. They are all orb weavers. Each female building a more or less wheel shaped web. Each web is supported on a tracery of shared support threads looking like some modern sculpture.

Unlike many of our spiders these all have common names. They are, in order of greatest number, Tailed Spider, Leaf-curling Spider and the Jewel or Six-spined Spider.

The Tailed spider (not to be confused with the unjustly maligned White-tailed Spider), is about 2 centimetres long, mottled brown in colour and can be immediately recognised by her greatly elongated abdomen which sometimes curves over her back scorpion-like. She sits in the centre of her web beneath a line of egg sacs laid on one of the spokes. The egg sacs are cleverly camouflaged with debris from her web and blobs of silk, which blends in perfectly with her appearance.

The Leaf-curling Spider is well known to gardeners, bushwalkers and spider-eating birds. It forms a tube from a leaf or other handy object on the ground that she has “winched” up, into position on a strand of silk. This forms a protective shelter in which she sits with her front legs barely touching the web awaiting her prey. She is about 8 mm long and has an oval, creamy-yellow abdomen. Brown Thornbills have been seen picking these spiders from their shelters. Another strand in the web of life.

The third of our spiders is a true gem. The name Jewel is most apt as her glossy black, white and yellow abdomen, about 10 mm in diameter, framed by orange legs, makes her one of the most colourful of local spiders. Six blunt spines project from the abdomen. These spiders often form large colonies, sometimes containing hundreds of individuals. When an unwary bushwalker comes in contact with the seemingly fragile gossamer structure the results can be quite uncomfortable.

As far as we could discover, none of these spiders is dangerous but some people have serious reactions to any spider bite. It pays to be careful.

Photos:

The Tailed Spider – in the centre below a line of egg sacs joined to a spoke of the web

Jewel Spider – one of the most colourful local spiders

