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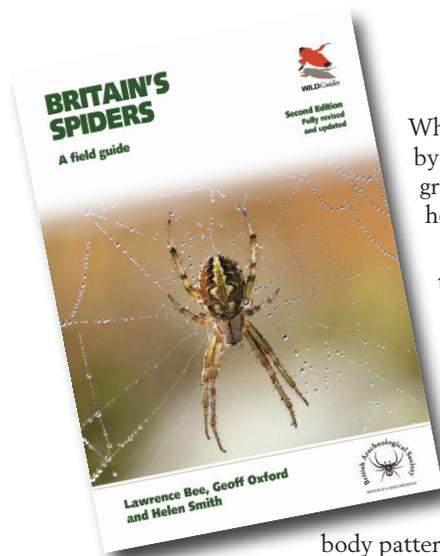
Britain's Spiders: A field guide *Second Edition*

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When the first edition of this field guide appeared in 2017, it revolutionised the study of spiders by providing a detailed photographic introduction to what is often considered a challenging group of invertebrates. So, when a second edition was issued just three years later, I did wonder how it could differ, and expected a few minor updates to the taxonomy and distribution.

How wrong I was. While the main body of the book does contain the expected updates, the quick guide to families in the introductory section has been completely revamped, expanding from the 20 pages in the first edition to 57 in the second. This section begins with definitions of the main features to look for: eye pattern, abdomen shape and patterns, and leg length. There is then a four-page photographic guide to commonly-observed spiders, which is followed by a guide to the broad categories of spiders' webs. Spider body shape for each family is next, with notes on eye pattern, distinctive markings and habitat. Then comes a detailed breakdown of the subfamilies, using just eye pattern as the main identification character. This is followed by a section offering a more detailed photographic breakdown of each family into genera, with notes in tabular form on size, body pattern and a reference to the species accounts. The detailed photographic guide to webs and egg cocoons has also been amended.

The bulk of the book comprises a series of detailed species accounts as described in my previous review:

"For each species there are notes on habitat and where to look within it, a description of the species morphology, the names of similar species, a distribution map and details of its conservation status plus a chart showing when it is adult, with a colour-coded guide to the sample size used to generate the chart. There are also details of the size of both sexes, which are presented as both numbers and a life-size scale bar. Each species count is accompanied by high quality photographs showing males and females plus colour variations where these are significantly different. As with previous Wild Guides, there are also tables that summarise the genera, offering details of habitat and distinctive morphological characters in a handy rapid-access chart. These accounts are followed by an introduction to the ethics of fieldwork and the spider recording scheme. The final section deals with legislation and conservation, providing a comprehensive table of all the known UK species, which offers an indication of the ease of identification, the percentage of 10 km squares in the UK from which it has been recorded, and details of its conservation status. The guide ends with a selection of useful books and websites for further reading, acknowledgements and an index."

This second edition improves a book that had already changed the way the spiders are perceived by naturalists and biologists. The new introduction offers easy access to the identification of British spiders to family and genus, giving those beginning the study of spiders and those with just a casual interest confidence in their identifications. The multi-access nature of this guide (which is a feature of most of the *Wild Guides*) allows users to check their identification from several perspectives before moving to the species accounts. The introduction of ocular signatures as a key feature has also simplified the identification process, making it quick and accurate. To misquote the House of Commons Speaker, 'The eyes have it'.

If you already own the first edition and spiders are just a casual interest, you may not need to update to the second edition. But, if you have a more serious interest in this group, the new section will be indispensable, and the more general updates of the species accounts will always be useful.

For beginners or, indeed, anyone who does not already own a copy of this guide, it is a must have volume that provides a comprehensive and easy to use introduction to this fascinating group. The authors are to be congratulated on improving an already excellent guide, and producing a gateway to what was once perceived as a difficult and demanding group.

Peter Smithers