

Eight-legged Cardinals *Tegenaria parietina* at Pershore Abbey

Steven Falk

I recall quite liking large house spiders as a very young child and handling them freely. But my mother was a dreadful arachnophobe. One day, perhaps at the age of six or seven, sitting in the cockpit of my 'Spitfire' (a large cardboard box with windows cut out - the wings were an old door) I looked up to see a large house spider immediately above me and completely flipped. It must have looked like one of those ejector seat moments. And I've had arachnophobia ever since - at least as far as large house spiders go.

When I joined Buglife in 2012, spiders were one of the most popular subjects of enquiries, so I decided to confront my fear and ignorance and learn more about them. I started a spider gallery within my ever-growing Flickr site (see: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/63075200@N07/collections/72157631875078693/>). Soon it had exceeded 100 species, and I realised that most spiders did not give me arachnophobia and indeed many were really striking and photogenic, especially orbweavers and jumping spiders. Large house spiders still gave me the jitters, but I was determined to include them in my gallery and overcame my phobia to photograph and critically identify two of our biggest ones, *Eratigena gigantea* and *E. saeva*. This then produced a growing desire to see and photograph the biggest one of them all, the Cardinal Spider *Tegenaria parietina*. I remember reading about it as a child. Males apparently have the greatest leg span of any British Spider; they like very old building; and best of all - Cardinal Wolsey, head of the Catholic Church during the reign of Henry VIII, was apparently terrified of them at Hampton Court.

I asked arachnologists I knew where I might be able to see them. Norwich Cathedral was one suggestion. Certain cliffs along the south coast was another. But it was a tweet in the summer of 2016 by Matt Prince that eventually gave me the opportunity. His tweet had some images of *T. parietina* from Pershore Abbey, and this was exciting, because very few decent images exist on the internet, and some are clearly misidentifications.

Fortunately, I had a meeting with Natural England nearby on the morning of 4th October 2016, so decided to drive home to Warwickshire via Pershore and check out the Abbey. The staff kindly let me poke about assorted nooks and crannies, but no joy. Fortunately, Matt had told me that they could also be found externally in the nooks and crannies of the south facing wall. So, using my Abbey leaflet, I tried to flush out anything living in the webs behind the large vertical drain pipes, and eventually a large house spider fell to the floor and curled up in a ball. I placed it in a large tupperware container and eventually it unfolded. Whilst not as large as I'd expected, it was clearly not a normal house spider. It was female, but the legs were much longer and hairier than *E. gigantea* or *E. saeva*. The body was rounder, darker, very hairy and lacked the complicated black and buff pattern of *E. gigantea* or *E. saeva*. It was clear that I had just encountered my first Cardinal Spider *T. parietina* (01 & 02). I kept searching and found one more female, and also a couple of *E. gigantea* (03) and was able to compare them and note just how different they look. Unfortunately no males were seen, so that remains a further challenge to tick off.

So I now have six species of 'house spider' on my Flickr site and feel pleased to have extended the number of Cardinal Spider photos that people can see on the internet - or should I say - the worldwide web!



01. *Tegenaria parietina*. Female. Pershore Abbey 2016. Steven Falk.



02. *Tegenaria parietina*. Female. Pershore Abbey 2016. Steven Falk.



03. *Eratigena gigantea*. Female. Pershore Abbey 2016. Steven Falk

Images

01. *Tegenaria parietina*. Female. Pershore Abbey 2016. Steven Falk.

02. *Tegenaria parietina*. Female. Pershore Abbey 2016. Steven Falk.

03. *Eratigena gigantea*. Female. Pershore Abbey 2016. Steven Falk