

***Zelotes petrensis* (C. L. Koch, 1839) (Araneae: Gnaphosidae) confirmed in Worcestershire.**

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A breeding population of *Zelotes petrensis* (C. L. Koch, 1839) has been discovered at the Devil's Spittleful Nature Reserve near Bewdley, Worcestershire. Grid Ref: SO 80488 74856.

During a spell of fine settled weather on 19.04.2019 a robust black spider was collected from a patch of sparsely vegetated sandy ground near the Severn Valley Railway line at the Devil's Spittleful. The spider momentarily stopped running for just enough time to allow me to take a single photograph. Rather than risk losing it in nearby leaf-litter and dense heather I decided to capture it immediately for later microscopic examination. From the moment I saw it I knew it was definitely a ground spider in the family Gnaphosidae, and more than likely one of several mainly black *Zelotes* species impossible to identify to species level from a photograph (please see the plates in Bee *et al*, 2017).

Later inspection under the microscope revealed my specimen to be a female and definitely in the genus *Zelotes*. Using the illustrations of female epigynes in *Collins Field Guide to Spiders of Britain & Northern Europe* (Roberts, 1996) I tentatively identified it as *Zelotes petrensis*, however, online research suggested I needed the opinion of an experienced spider expert because *Z. petrensis* is a nationally rare species known mainly from the south-east of England. I posted the specimen to John Partridge who replied to confirm that it was *Zelotes petrensis*.



01. *Zelotes petrensis* (female) at the Devil's Spittleful. 19.04.2019. K.McGee.

Zelotes petrensis has a conservation category of Nationally Rare. There are just twenty records on the NBN Atlas, and many are unconfirmed. Most of the accepted records are from the Suffolk coast during the 1990's, and a single record from Fife in Scotland during 1993. There is an unconfirmed record from Worcestershire; one was recorded near Kingsford in the far north of the county in 1992. Further unconfirmed records are from the Home Counties around London.

All *Zelotes* species are nocturnal hunters spending most of the day hiding beneath logs and stones or in leaf-litter, although some are known to actively run around diurnally during hot sunny weather (Roberts, 1996). All are associated with dry open habitats; especially those found around coastlines, brownfield sites, sandy heaths and chalk grasslands. The species most likely to be encountered in such habitats in our region is *Z. latreillei*, which is also the commonest of the genus throughout Britain. *Z. petrensis* is a

heathland species rare in Britain but widely distributed on the continent (Roberts, 1996).

Acknowledgements

With grateful thanks to John Partridge who confirmed the identification and has retained the voucher specimen.

References

- Bee, L., Oxford, G. & Smith, H. 2017. *Britain's Spiders, a Field Guide*. Princeton University Press, Woodstock.
 NBN Atlas *Species search* [on-line] <http://www.nbnatlas.org/> [Accessed 03.05.2019]
 Roberts, M. J. (1996). *Field Guide to the Spiders of Britain and Northern Europe*. HarperCollins Publishers Ltd, London.

Image

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