

The Green-fanged Tubeweb Spider *Segestria florentina* in Pershore and Bewdley

Brett Westwood



01. *Segestria florentina* showing metallic green chelicerae. Pershore Abbey 29.09.21. Harry Green

On 29 September 2021 Harry Green and I visited Pershore Abbey with Bob Gillmor to look for the Cardinal Spider *Tegenaria parietina*. As we were descending a small flight of steps at the rear of the abbey, I noticed the abdomen of a large spider positioned at an unnatural angle across a hole on the exterior wall of the abbey (01).



02. *Segestria florentina* apparently paralysed by a rival. Pershore Abbey 29.09.21. Brett Westwood.

Following our unsuccessful search for Cardinals, the mystery spider was still in position so we teased it out of the hole and examined it more closely. It was very large - over 20mm long - and alive, though apparently paralysed by a rival. Its size suggested *Segestria florentina* and this identification was confirmed when we saw its metallic green chelicerae (02). After photographing it from various angles (03), a privilege which we would not have enjoyed had it been in good health, we returned it to another, safer crack in the wall.

I informed John Partridge, Worcestershire Arachnidae Recorder, who confirmed the identification, but said that he'd not seen the species in the county. Maps prepared by the Spiders and Harvestmen Recording Scheme on the British Arachnological Society website revealed at least two other county locations, at Great Malvern and in central Worcester, but our observations at Pershore were apparently the first for the locality. This was unsurprising as *Segestria florentina* has until recent years, been a southern species largely restricted to ports and coastal towns. It is an accomplished stowaway which arrived in the UK in the mid-1840s from the Mediterranean region and has made landfall in North America and Australia.



03. *Segestria florentina* female. Pershore Abbey 29.09.21. Brett Westwood.

Its size and green jaws are striking enough, but most of its discoverers will remember it for its hunting technique. The spider lives in silken tubes in wall-cracks where it sits with six of its legs positioned on tripwires which encircle the exterior of its lair (04). When a prey item, which could be a bee or a beetle, walks over the tripwire, the spider dashes out and seizes its victim, retreating rapidly to subdue and consume its prize. This speed of attack is breath-taking and necessary because the radiating tripwires are not adhesive: their purpose is purely tactile. No less a spider expert than Bill Bristowe, author of *The World of Spiders* (Collins New Naturalist no. 38) wrote that “it is unusual for the beginner’s nerves to stand the strain of this huge spider with her flashing green jaws, darting out with the speed of lightning.” Photographer Stephen Dalton, a self-confessed arachnophobe, records that a photo taken at one three-thousandth of a second was not enough to freeze the attacking motion.



04. Characteristic web of *Segestria florentina*. Pershore Abbey 29.09.21. Brett Westwood

Brisowe’s searches in the 1930s produced sightings in Bristol, Exmouth and Fowey as well as central London. *Segestria* has since spread north, so when we found a small colony of about ten holes in a brick wall in Bewdley during a Wyre Forest Study group trip on 7 September 2022, we were excited, but not entirely surprised. It is difficult to know how these spiders arrived, though river transport is a possibility. Rosemary Winnall, John and Denise Bingham and I have searched unsuccessfully for them in Stourport and Worcester in autumn 2022, so it seems to be scarce in the county. It is easily overlooked though, so check your local walls at night in summer and early autumn: if you’re feeling brave, you can entice the spiders from their tubes with a tuning fork or an electric toothbrush.

Acknowledgements

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References

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Images

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