

Missing Sector Orb Web Spider

Zygiella x-notata

Overall size: up to 15mm

Season: all year round (often conspicuous even in winter)

A small spider with pale body and legs and silver-grey markings on the abdomen. It is usually found around the outside of houses and gardens, and is particularly common around windows.

Webs are at first classic orb webs – radiating spokes from a central point with concentric circles of web. On closer inspection a quadrant is always missing, which gives rise to its common name of the Missing Sector Orb Web Spider.

This spider feeds on almost any flying insect captured within its web. As the outside temperature becomes colder in late autumn, they frequently come indoors through open windows, and build their webs on the insides of windows instead.



Can spiders bite? All spiders can bite – that's how most subdue and kill their prey – but only a small number have fangs that are strong enough to pierce human skin. Spider bites are quite rare, so there is generally no cause for concern if you see spiders in your home.

Of the 650 species of spider found in the UK only about 12 species have been recorded as being able to bite us and these are larger spiders. Of these, only 2 or 3 have been known to give a significant or unpleasant bite. Symptoms have usually been described as localised pain and swelling. In the rare event of symptoms more acute than these, medical advice should be taken.

If you pick up a spider, as with any living creature, you should remember that it is delicate and handle it with care and respect.

Get help identifying your spiders... visit the Natural History Museum's forum www.nhm.ac.uk/natureplus/community/identification/bug-forum/spiders or email a photo to the Identification and Advisory Service ias2@nhm.ac.uk.

Develop your passion for nature at the Angela Marmont Centre for UK Biodiversity – a hub for naturalists that offers free access to workshop space, study facilities, microscopes and collections. www.nhm.ac.uk/ukbiodiversity

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Spiders in your home

Almost all of us will have seen spiders in our homes – perhaps walking across the lounge floor, stuck in the bath, or quietly sitting in a ceiling corner. Several species share our living spaces, some staying year round whilst others have just found their way in through open windows or gaps beneath doors.

The truth is that few spiders are able to comfortably live in modern centrally-heated homes. The majority would prefer to be helped back outside where they live in garages and sheds or among the general clutter around the outsides of homes and in gardens.

Spiders are very important in our urban environment and help to control the numbers of many nuisance household pests, so are useful and eco-friendly pest controllers. Use this guide to get to know your lodgers a little better – it will help you to identify six species commonly observed in homes.

House Spider

Tegenaria species

Overall size: up to 120mm

Season: usually autumn months when males leave their webs in search of females and frequently enter homes through open windows, chimneys or gaps beneath doors.

A large spider with a brown cephalothorax and tan-coloured abdomen often with characteristic 'herring bone' pattern. Six species of this group are commonly found in homes and they are the classic 'spider in the bath' or the spider dashing across the living room floor.

Sheet-like webs are usually built in garages, sheds, loft spaces and cavity walls. They are less likely to be full time occupants of our living areas due to disturbance.



Largest and smallest spiders in the UK... The largest spider found in the UK is the Cardinal Spider *Tegenaria parietina*. Male examples have been recorded with an impressive 12 cm leg span. By comparison the smallest species of 'Money spiders' (family Linyphiidae) have a leg span of little more than 2 mm.

Daddy Long Legs Spider

Pholcus phalangioides

Overall size: up to 45mm

Season: all year round

A large spider, but with a very small greyish body and long thin legs. They prefer the warm and constant temperatures of our homes, garages and sheds, and are rarely found outdoors as they cannot survive winter temperatures.

Webs are untidy without great design, often made in ceiling corners. If disturbed they vibrate in their webs, which is probably a way to frighten predators. They feed on any insects found in homes and will also take other spiders, including surprisingly large House Spiders (*Tegenaria* species).

This species is not native to the UK, and may have been introduced through trade. It has become more widely distributed over the last 30 years.



Zebra Jumping Spider

Salticus scenicus

Overall size: 8mm

Season: spring through to autumn

A small spider with white and black markings and a characteristic jerky 'start and stop' movement. Usually found hunting on external walls and surfaces but frequently venturing indoors through open doors and windows.

This group of spiders do not use webs to catch their prey but actively hunt by day. They have large eyes and ambush small insects by pouncing on them.



Spiders found in fruit... Spiders that are not UK species are occasionally found in imported fruit such as grapes or bananas; these can include species that are more seriously venomous.

If you find spiders under these circumstances it is always worth seeking advice. You can get these identified by emailing an image to ias2@nhm.ac.uk.

Lace Web Spider

Amaurobius species

Overall size: 20mm

Season: all year round, but most common in homes in autumn when males leave their webs to search for female spiders. Also common after heavy rain when they become flooded out of their own homes.

A medium-sized spider, usually brown and frequently having yellowish markings on the abdomen. One of five species of Lace Web spiders. Usually found outdoors on walls, fencing and clutter around the garden.

Webs are characteristically 'lace-like' in construction and made over surfaces. A central hole where the spider retreats is usually obvious. They will feed on most insects that crawl across their web, rushing out of their retreat to ambush them.



False Widow Spider

Steatoda grossa

Overall size: 20mm

Season: all year round

A medium-sized spider usually dark brown all over with a bulbous abdomen. Often found in garages, sheds and clutter around the garden but also in cooler parts of homes particularly beneath kitchen appliances and cupboards.

One of six UK species in the group known as False Widows. Although they resemble Black Widow spiders, they are not as harmful.

Webs are very 'tangled' in appearance and usually built in undisturbed areas at ground level. They feed on a wide variety of prey including beetles, woodlice, flies and moths.

