

## Spiders : 2006

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The year 2006 has not produced any new species for Hertfordshire and field work has again been limited by health and other physical disabilities. However some field work was continued and visits have been made to the Withey Beds L.N.R. near Rickmansworth (TQ 079941). Other sites visited included Bricket Wood Common, Rye Meads N.R., Cassiobury Park N.R., and Hunsdon Mead. The very dry hot weather from July onwards seems to have had a deleterious effect on the number and variety of specimens and searching the ground layer was not very productive.

Sweeping and beating the vegetation however was much better and whilst last year we had the first two reports of the so-called Wasp spider, *Argiope bruennichi* in Hertfordshire, there have been four reliable reports of females this year together with specimens or photos. The female of this spider when fully grown is large (up to 15mm) and highly visible with yellow and black bands across the abdomen. The first specimen, found by Neil Brookes, came from the Abbots Langley allotments situated behind the "Compasses" public house in Tibbs Hill Road (TL 098017) on the 19<sup>th</sup> of August. Four days later on the 23<sup>rd</sup> I received photos of a large female wrapping silk around a grasshopper that had jumped into its web. This was from Bricket Wood Common (TL 129006). On the 10<sup>th</sup> of September David Sampson photographed another female just south of Twyford Lock near Bishops Stortford (TL 493192). This was on the east bank of the R.Stort and appears to be just inside Herts as the county boundary bears east before this point and then encircles Bishops Stortford.. The final report and sighting came from Sue Bird of the Barnet Countryside Centre. Again this was a female busily wrapping a grasshopper that had jumped into its web. This is also very close to the VC 20 /21 boundary but at TQ 235975 it looks to be in Hertfordshire.

From these reports we can assume that *Argiope bruennichi* at last appears to be rapidly colonising Hertfordshire after a slow start and there must have been other un-reported occurrences. Since 1970 this species has been expanding its range northwards from its original location near the South Coast and during the last ten years there have been many reports from all the counties surrounding Hertfordshire. This is a species which is widespread in Western Europe and maybe this expansion is another indicator of the changing climate.