

Introduction to spider families

There are approximately 670 species of spider in 38 different families in the UK. This guide introduces 17 families of spiders, providing an example of a species or genus to look for in each.

Please Note: The vast majority of spiders in the UK need examination under a microscope of mature adults to confirm species. Immature specimens may be identified to family or to genus level and often only by an expert. This guide has been designed to introduce several families with information on key features in each and is not an identification guide.

Woodlouse spiders (Family Dysderidae)

4 species in 2 genera

Rather elongate looking spiders with no clear markings or pattern on their cylindrical abdomen. They have six eyes that are clustered together in a circular formation. Often found under stones, logs, tree bark and other debris. Typical body length in family ranges from 6-15mm.

Species to look out for - Woodlouse spider (*Dysdera crocata*)

A distinctive species with a red cephalothorax and legs and forward projecting chelicerae. This species feeds on woodlice and can be found under stones and debris in warm (and sometimes) slightly damp situations. Generally nocturnal - look for them in gardens and on walls where they may be found sheltering in silken retreats. This species is common in England but less so in Scotland, being absent from the very north.

Look out for *Harpactea hombergi* which although similar in appearance has a narrower cephalothorax and with less prominent chelicerae.



Woodlouse spider (female)

Male: 9–10mm
Female: 11–15mm

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Goblin spiders (Family Oonopidae)

2 species in 1 genus

Both species in this genus are nocturnal and are recorded in Scotland. They have a very distinctive way of moving—periods of slow walking interspersed with rapid sprints. During the day they spend time in a silken retreat. Both species are pale to dark pink in colour and their six eyes are closely arranged in a group which is almost as wide as their head.

Species to look out for - Pink prowler (*Oonops domesticus*)

Although small, this spider is often seen on walls and ceilings hunting for prey in the early hours of the morning or late at night. It is under recorded in Scotland due to its small size and nocturnal habits. Look out for *Oonops pulcher* - not normally found in houses but under bark, stones and leaves in grass piles and tussocks.



Pink prowler

Body length: 1–2 mm
in both sexes

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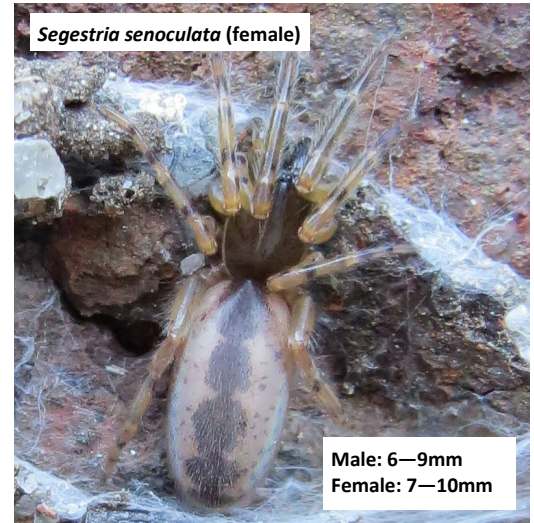
Tubeweb spiders (Family Segestriidae)

3 species in 1 genus

Spiders in this family construct tubular webs in the holes of walls and trees to retreat into. The spider sits by the entrance waiting for passing prey to disturb the webs silken entrance threads. Key features of family include three rows of two eyes and an elongated cylindrical looking abdomen.

Species to look out for - *Segestria senoculata*

Only species in the family to be recorded in Scotland, this species has a distinctive abdominal pattern and spins its tubular web in the holes of walls and in decaying wood (where it will utilise holes left by wood-boring beetles). The species is common and widespread across Britain.



Segestria senoculata (female)

Male: 6–9mm
Female: 7–10mm

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Cellar spiders (Family Pholcidae)

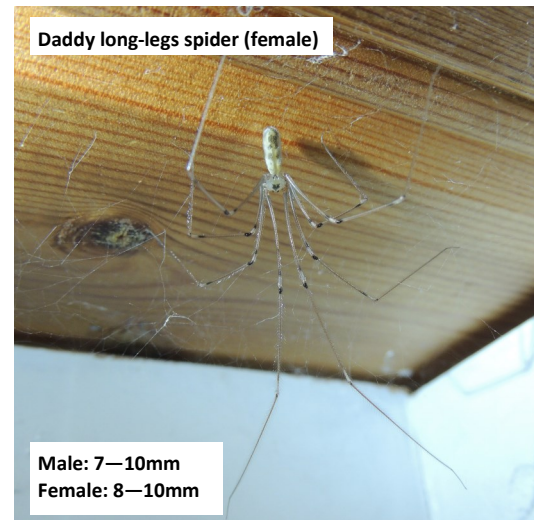
3 species in 3 genera

Almost always found in buildings, two of the three species have been recorded in Scotland. Often mistaken for harvestman with their very small bodies and long thin legs—remember harvestman can't make silk! Cellar spiders spin a criss-crossed web to catch flying insects and even other spiders! If disturbed, they whirl madly in their webs. Females hold their egg sacs in their chelicerae while in the web.

Species to look out for-

Daddy long-legs spider (*Pholcus phalangioides*)

Often found in the corners of ceilings in your homes where adults can be seen sitting (often upside down) in their webs waiting for prey.



Daddy long-legs spider (female)

Male: 7–10mm
Female: 8–10mm

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Comb-footed spiders (Family Theridiidae)

58 species in 19 genera

Although similar to money spiders at first glance, comb-footed spiders have a more rounded abdomen and often downward projecting spinnerets. The family name comes from a row of serrated bristles on the tarsus of the 4th leg—requires hand lens or microscope to see and may be absent in some species.

Species to look out-

Common candy-striped spider (*Enoplognatha ovata*)

Found on low growing vegetation where females roll up a leaf to create a retreat for their blue coloured egg-sac. Has a dark median band on cephalothorax. Three abdominal colour forms with two rows of black dots: completely yellowish-white, or with two red longitudinal rows or a single broad red band.



Common candy-striped spider (female) - two red band form

Male: 3–5mm
Female: 4–6mm

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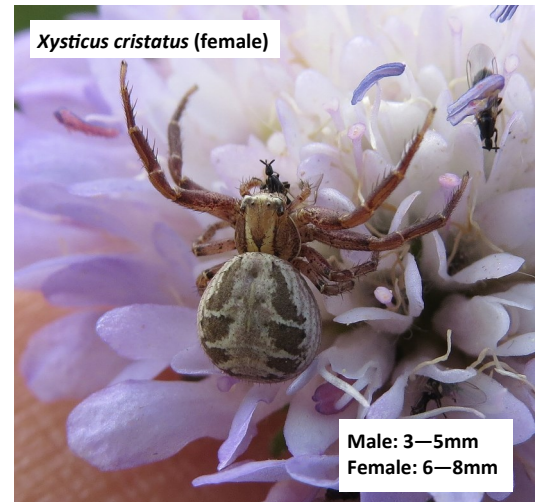
Crab spiders (Family Thomisidae)

27 species in 7 genera

Broad-bodied spiders— first and second pair of legs longer and more robust giving them an almost crab-like appearance. Species in this group typically lie in wait for prey on flowers and other vegetation. They have eight bead-like eyes that are roughly equal in size. Of the seven genera in this family, five have only a single species with no records for Scotland.

Species to look out for - *Xysticus cristatus*

Very crab-like with a squat and rounded appearance. Most common species of *Xysticus* (there are 11 other species in the UK that are all similar in appearance) and can be found on low vegetation in a wide range of habitats. Requires examination under a microscope to confirm the species.



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Running crab spiders (Family Philodromidae)

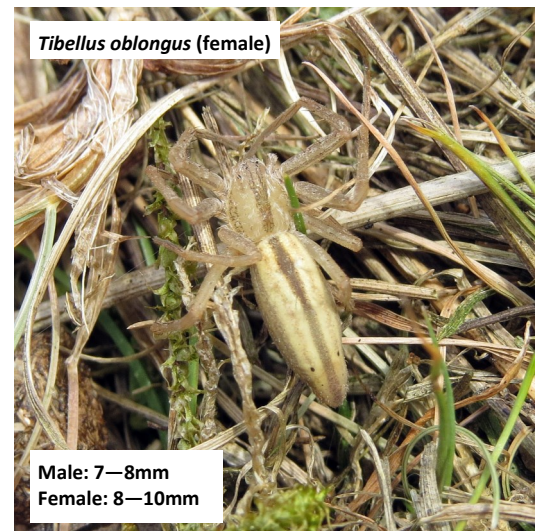
18 species in 3 genera

Fast moving crab-like spiders that are often found on low-lying vegetation or on the ground. They appear to be flattened and have an almost circular looking cephalothorax. The eight bead-like eyes are similar to crab spiders (Family Thomisidae).

Species to look out for-

Tibellus oblongus and *Tibellus maritimus*

Both species are similar in appearance and require examination with a microscope. These spiders are straw-coloured with a distinctive long abdomen and long legs. Often seen extending themselves along vegetation where they remain motionless waiting for their prey. Both species may be found in bogs, rough grasslands and on the coast.



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Orb weaver spiders (Family Araneidae)

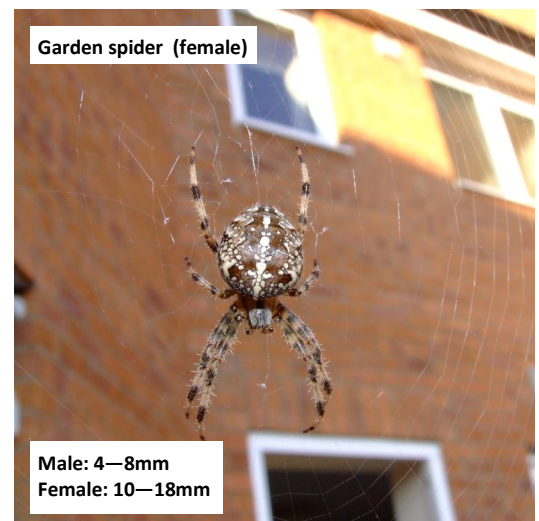
32 species in 16 genera

All species in this family spin orb like webs which they use to trap flying insects— webs can be up to 40cm in diameter! Many are brightly coloured and males are usually smaller than females, which often have rounded abdomens. The family includes one of the UK's heaviest spiders— females of the Four-spot orb weaver (*Araneus quadratus*) can weigh up to 2.5 grams!

Species to look out for-

Garden cross spider (*Araneus diadematus*)

Probably our most common species of orb weaver found in a wide range of habitats, including gardens. Adults have a distinctive central cross-like pattern of pale/white spots on the abdomen - the rest of the abdomen can vary in colour.



© Greg Hitchcock

Money spiders (Family Linyphiidae)

280 species in 123 genera

The largest family of spiders with the vast majority of them requiring examination under a microscope to determine species. They are found in a wide range of habitats on low plants and trees. Their webs are often densely woven and in horizontal sheets that are supported above and below by loose threads that are attached to surrounding vegetation.

Species to look out for -

Common sheetweb spider (*Linyphia triangularis*)

A distinctive species with a dark median band on cephalothorax that splits into two in the anterior half. Found on bushes and low vegetation where it spins its sheet webs up to six metres above the ground!



Sac spiders (Family Clubionidae)

24 species in 2 genera

Nocturnal spiders found on the ground or on low growing vegetation. They usually have little patterning to their brown looking bodies. They have cone-shaped spinnerets that are very close together at the base of the abdomen. Females can be found guarding their egg sacs in silk cells, hidden in vegetation or in leaves folded over and even under loose bark. Species in the *Clubiona* genus require examination under a microscope.

Species to look out for- *Cheiracanthium erraticum*

Occurs in grassy habitats, heathlands and marshes. One of the few species in this family with a distinct abdominal pattern- reddish central stripe within a broad, yellowish band that is flanked by greenish-grey sides.



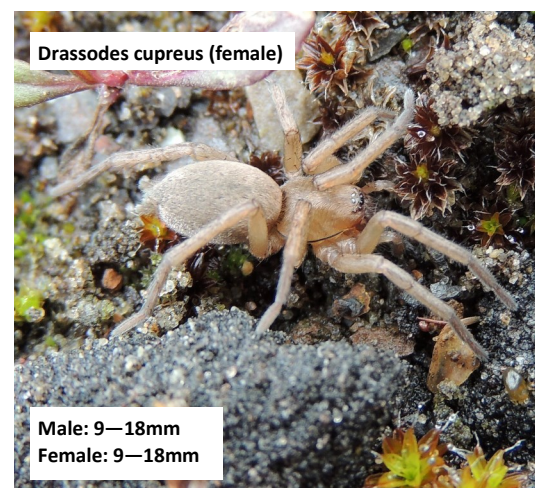
Ground spiders (Family Gnaphosidae)

33 species in 11 genera

Nocturnal spiders found on open ground and under stones. The cephalothorax narrows at the front and the abdomen of most species has little patterning with short and dense hairs giving it a furry looking appearance. It has distinctive cylindrical spinnerets, first pair are slightly longer than the rear pair. When viewed from below they are well separated and the middle pair can be seen between the first and third pair.

Species to look out for- *Drassodes cupreus*

Commonest species in this genus with a copper coloured coat that can aid in identification. The species is widespread across the UK and can be found under stones and other debris as well as in grassy tussocks, particularly on heaths and old grasslands.



Long-jawed spiders (Family Tetragnathidae)

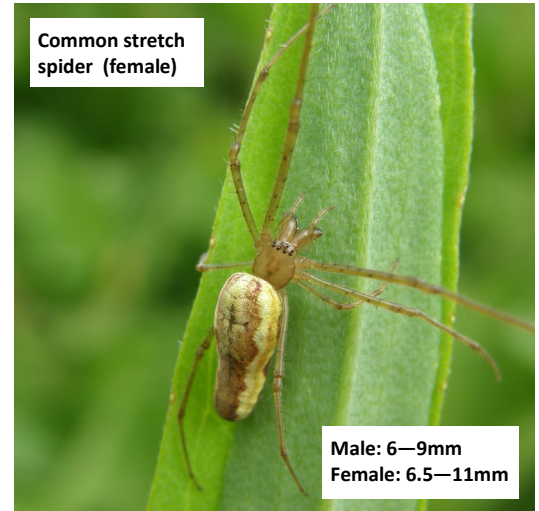
14 species in 4 genera

A diverse family found in a wide range of habitats; includes the Cave spiders (*Meta* species). Species of *Tetragnatha* and *Pachygnatha* have long forward-projecting chelicerae.

Species to look out for-

Common stretch spider (*Tetragnatha extensa*)

A common species found in wetlands where it spins its web in low growing vegetation— the adults can often be found resting stretched out amongst nearby vegetation. Similar to other species of *Tetragnatha* although on the underside of the cephalothorax look for a yellow paler patch (only this species and *Tetragnatha pinicola* have this pale patch).



Laceweb spiders (Family Amaurobiidae)

5 species in 2 genera

Fairly large and robust looking spiders found on buildings, hedges, and under stones and tree bark. The pattern of the abdomen is characteristic with a dark cardiac mark and a paler rim. Most species have a silken retreat which they construct at night in holes in walls and/or tree bark with the web extending around the entrance to catch passing prey.

Species to look out for- *Amaurobius similis*

Typically found around buildings where their webs have a lace-like appearance when fresh. A common and widespread nocturnal species. Similar in appearance to the other two species in *Amaurobius* genus and often needs examination under a microscope to confirm the species.



Funnel-web spiders (Family Agelenidae)

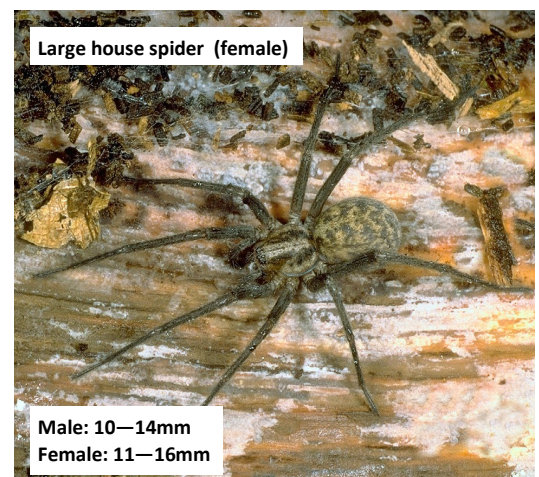
11 species in 3 genera

Found in a range of habitats including in buildings, on walls, hedges and vegetation. Key identification features include the chevron pattern on the abdomen and the distinctly longer first pair of spinnerets that are composed of two segments. They make large webs of horizontal sheets of silk with a tubular funnel shape at one end to catch passing prey.

Species to look out for-

Large house spider (*Tegenaria gigantea*)

A large spider with long legs typically found in houses and garages. Similar to other species of *Tegenaria*, there is a thin dark border round the cephalothorax and the abdomen has a series of pale looking chevrons.



Jumping spiders (Family Salticidae)

38 species in 17 genera

This family has four very large forward-facing eyes (along with two medium sized and two much smaller eyes) and a square fronted cephalothorax. Found in a wide range of habitats, they have short powerful legs that they use to jump to catch prey—watch out for other spiders that also jump when hunting!

Species to look out for -

Common zebra jumping spider (*Salticus scenicus*)

A distinctive species of spider that enjoys the warmth, often being found on sunny walls and fences in houses and gardens. The cephalothorax is black with patches of white iridescent hairs. The abdomen is black with white patches that appear like black and white stripes.



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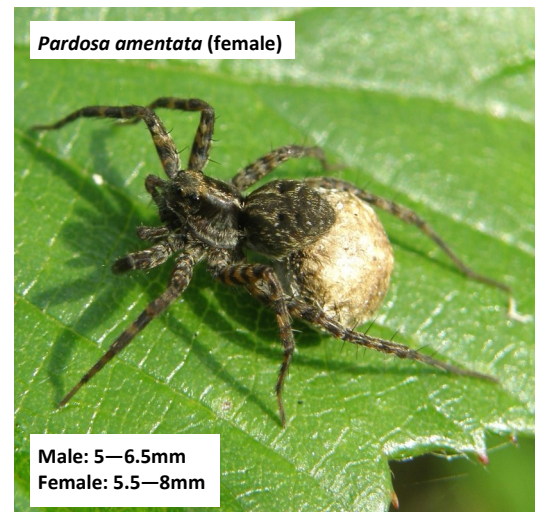
Wolf spiders (Family Lycosidae)

38 species in 8 genera

A large group of ground hunting spiders that enjoy basking in the sun and are often seen running across the ground if disturbed. Females carry eggs sac covered in silk attached to their spinnerets and when the eggs hatch will carry the young spiderlings. They have a distinctive eye pattern - four small forward facing eyes in a row along the very front of the cephalothorax, and four larger eyes that form a square behind the row of small eyes.

Species to look out for- *Pardosa amentata*

Species of *Pardosa* make up the largest group of wolf spiders in the UK and all require examination under a microscope to confirm the species as many are very similar in general appearance to each other and live in the same habitats.



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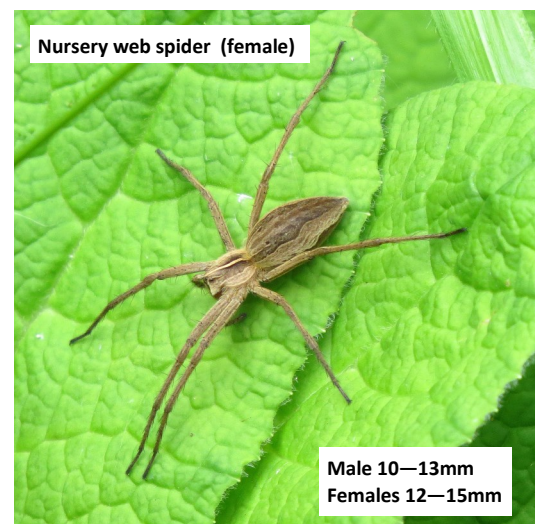
Nursery-web spiders (Family Pisauridae)

3 species in 2 genera

Large spiders superficially similar to wolf spiders but with a tapering abdomen. Found in a range of habitats, on vegetation or, for the two species of raft spider (*Dolomedes* species), on water. Females carry egg sacs in their chelicerae and under their body. When the eggs hatch the spiderlings live in a large tent-like nursery web constructed by the female.

Species to look out for- Nursery web spider (*Pisaura mirabilis*)

A distinctive looking spider found in low vegetation in a range of habitats and often seen sunbathing. The cephalothorax typically has a dark median band with a paler band running along the whole length and the abdomen usually has a wavy-edged leaf shaped pattern covering its whole length.



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