In late 2001, I was invited by some colleagues in the Manchester Museum to survey the spider fauna of Alderley Edge, a wooded sandstone escarpment rising some 200 m above the Cheshire plain. About 250 acres of the Edge are now owned by the National Trust and the site was recognised as an important candidate for review under the Monument Protection Programme. It is now covered with secondary closed woods, which were planted in the middle of the eighteenth century and since then have replaced the former heathland. Further information about the peculiar history of the Edge, its legends and the Alderley Edge Landscape Project can be found on two main sites: http://wwwpaul.moss6 btinternet.co.uk/ and http://www.derbyssc.org.uk/alderley/index.html.

This short paper outlines the results of a preliminary survey of the arachnid fauna of the Edge carried out by the author assisted by his daughter, Anna Logunova. We made 16 one-day trips to the site in 2002 (late March to mid-October) and used four collecting methods: hand-picking, sieving the litter, sweeping, and shaking of twigs and branches of shrubs and low trees (e.g. gorse, hawthorn and others). Pitfall traps were not used. Altogether, we collected 1,283 adult specimens belonging to 114 spider, 11 harvestmen and one false-scorpion species were collected and identified.

The arachnid fauna of UK can be considered well studied; nevertheless, local lists and records remain important for recording schemes (e.g. Harvey et al., 2002). Although most of the species listed below are quite common and widespread, at least two records seem to be worthy of some attention: one of the northernmost UK records of Clubionidae cornutus; also one of the northernmost records of Entelescara congesta in the UK (see Harvey et al., 2002, p. 82).

An interesting case of araneophagy by a theridiid spider was observed in Alderley Edge. On 13th July 2002, I found a female Theridion impressum eating an adult female Larinioides cornutus. Both species built up their nests on the same stem of the Marsh Thistle (Cistium palustre) and occasionally the former species predated the latter one.

All the material was identified by the author, apart from some Linyphiidae represented by single females, which were treated by Dr Andrei Tanasevitch (Moscow); I am most grateful for his help. The spiders and harvestmen collected during this study have been divided between the Manchester Museum and the Zoological Museum of Moscow State University.

References


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In the species list (right), numbers in square brackets refer to habitats: 1- in crevices of sandy gorges; 2- under bank of fallen trees; 3- rocks (under dry ferns and grass clumps, in litter, moss, lichen); 4- secondary forb meadow; 5- gorse shrubs (shaking off from twigs); 6- damp meadow with rushes; 7- heather on stony slope; 8- broad-leaved (bally-oak-beech) wood (in litter and on ferns); 9- moss-heather-blueberry heath (in litter); 10- open sandy heath (with sparse grassy vegetation); 11- pine forest (in litter and on ferns); 12- damp birch forest (under rotten logs and in litter).