YounGnats Newsletter October 2015

Make your own nature mobile

If you are out for a walk in the countryside this autumn, try collecting materials like leaves, acorns, conkers, cones, beech masts, winged sycamore seeds, feathers, pieces of bark and grass seed heads. Also find a stick about 30cm long.

Image from Nature's Playground (Danks & Schofield)

Other things you will require are string or wool, a skewer or bradawl, scissors and a tapestry needle. Then all you need to do is:

- Make holes through the seeds and nuts using the skewer or bradawl (**please ask an adult to assist you**).
- Make a knot at the end of a piece of string, then using the needle when necessary thread or tie on a mixture of items on to the string. Ensure you have a selection of heavy and light ones so the weight is evenly distributed.
- Repeat this to create several strings which can be of various lengths.
- Now attach a piece of string about 50cm long to each end of the stick and hang it up.
- Lastly tie each of the strings to the stick, so they are evenly balanced along the length of it.

Remember – do not try eating any of the items you collect. Please ask an adult to ensure none of the items you have collected are poisonous.

Spiders

This is a great time of year to see spiders; most of them are males going in search of a mate. There are approximately 600 different species of spider in England and almost half of them are very small indeed - less than 3mm long. Spiders are not insects but arachnids as are mites, ticks and scorpions. All spiders have eight legs, whereas insects have six. A spider's body has two parts a cephalothorax (head and thorax) and the abdomen, whereas insects have three. Also spiders do not have antennae, but bristly hairs on their bodies and legs which are used to pick up signals and messages.

All spiders are carnivorous but they have small mouths, so in order to eat they inject poison into their victims with a pair of sharp fangs. The poison contains digestive fluids which turns the insides of their victims into a kind of soup. The spider then drinks their insides leaving just an empty skin.

Spiders have a variety of hunting methods. Some spiders spin webs to catch their food so unfortunate victims, like flies, get trapped on the sticky strands of the web, and then the spider moves in for the kill. Other spiders hunt by stalking their prey, and some jump on their prey.

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 as eco-friendly pest controllers, although the Garden Spider will also eat butterflies and bees!

Why not have a search around your house and garden, then use the separate ID sheet to record which ones you find. You can also submit your records via the BNHS website at www.bnhs.co.uk using the Living Record facility.

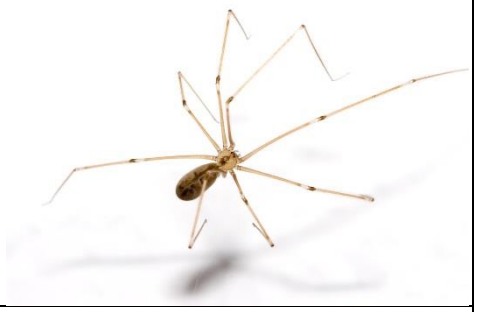
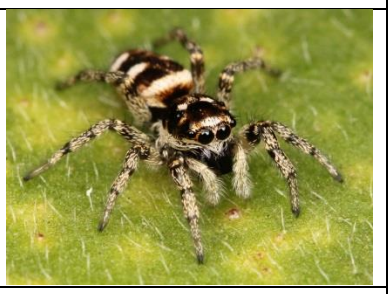
Have you been to one of our YounGnats events? The next ones you may like to come along to are:

- Sunday 18th October – Bromham Mill Apple Day, 11am to 4.30pm. BNHS nature table will be on display and test your knowledge with the quiz. (There may be an entry fee) TL010507.
- Saturday 7th November – Ramble in Ashridge Commons & Woods, meet at 10.30am outside Brownlow café SP970130.
- Sunday 6th December – Rushmere Christmas Fair, 11am to 3pm. Visit the BNHS stand to see the nature table, displays and quizzes. Park in car park off Linslade Rd (£2 charge) SP912284

See www.bnhs.co.uk/youngnats/ for more details and remember to sign up for email updates so you get the latest information.

There is also an article about 'Scientific classification in natural history' on the YounGnats website, which follows on from the article in the last newsletter about creating your own nature display.

Spider ID sheet

House spider *Tegenaria species*	Date & location seen:
A large spider growing up to 120mm the tan-coloured abdomen often has a characteristic 'herring bone' pattern. 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.	
Daddy Long Leg or Cellar Spider *Pholcus phalangioides*	Date & location seen:
This spider grows up to 45mm, but with a very small greyish body and long thin legs. They prefer the warm and constant temperatures of our homes, garages and sheds, so 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 also eat other spiders.	
Zebra Jumping Spider *Salticus scenicus*	Date & location seen:
A small spider, only 8mm, 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, hence their name.	
Garden Spider *Araneus diadematus*	Date & location seen:
This spider grows up to 10mm, it is the UK's commonest 'orb web spider' and can be found almost everywhere. They build their typical spider webs (spirals with radial threads) out of sticky silk. They sit in the middle of the web, waiting to feel the vibrations of a struggling insect caught in the web, at which point they rush out and wrap it tightly in silk. Once immobilised they will kill their victim with a venomous bite. The Garden Spider can be easily distinguished by the white cross, made up of pale spots and streaks, on its abdomen.	
Harvestman *Opiliones species*	Date & location seen:
Although Harvestmen are arachnids and look like spiders they are not, as they have just one body part as compared to two in spiders. They eat smaller invertebrates which they catch using hooks at the ends of their legs, instead of poisoning their prey. Harvestmen can be found in leaf litter, amongst foliage and in grass. They often come into houses and defend themselves by secreting a foul-smelling fluid if they are caught; they are also able to shed a leg to escape.