The other arachnids

MENTION the word arachnid and many people would instantly think of spiders. Some might even be aware that scorpions fall into this group of creepy-crawlies. However, besides spiders and scorpions, there are many other types of arachnids out there that most people do not know about. This article will look at some of them.

Arachnids are often mistaken for insects but once you know what to look for, it is very difficult to be fooled again. Arachnids have two body segments where the head and chest (thorax) are fused to form what is called a cephalothorax. They also have four pairs of legs and no wings or antennae. Some arachnids resemble other arachnids and the next three groups of arachnids get their common name from their overall resemblance to scorpions. Whipscorpions are long to order Thelyphonida with a body length of up to 85 mm. As their name suggests, they resemble scorpions, however their tail is very thin and whip-like called a telson, hence their common name. This tail lacks a stinger and is not used by the arachnid to defend itself or to catch prey but to sense its environment.

There are also tailless whipscorpions which belong to the order Amblypygi. They also have a broad flattened body like a scorpion but possess very large spiny pedipalps (pinchers) which they use to grasp and impale their predators which then rip apart using their jaws. Their first pair of legs is highly modified and resembles long, thin, whip-like antennae.

Pseudoscorpions are also called "daddy long legs" because of their tiny bodies and very long thin legs. These arachnids belong to the order or group of order Opiliones the name derived from the Latin word "spilo" which roughly translates to "spiny feet" – a reference to European shepherds who once wore stilts to look over their sheep. Harvestmen do not produce venom, instead they use their jaws to rip their prey apart. These arachnids have quite a varied diet and do not prefer to prey on specific insect species but making them good biological control agents. Harvestmen would themselves be tempering targets for predators. To this end, they can even defend themselves with an offensive odour either as a gas or liquid secretory from their scent glands. They can also shed legs if threatened and even around rapidly on their remaining ones. However, they do not regenerate these lost limbs. As you can see there is a lot to learn about these diminutive "mini-beasts".

TO CONTACT THE TT Field Naturalists Club: admin@ttfc.org or visit our website at www.ttfc.org and our Facebook or YouTube pages.

BY ORDER OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Lucy Ottley
Honorary Secretary

Harvestman arachnids are also called "daddy long legs" because of their tiny bodies and very long thin legs.