



Tales from a  
**Sisters Naturalist**  
by Jim Anderson

**Spiders forever!**

Yes, I admit, I've done it to every one of my six children and 13 grandchildren: I've exposed them to the beauty and the role of spiders in our lives.

It was so beautiful in my house when my kids were growing up. Never once did I hear a scream and the shrill cry of alarm, "It's a spider!" Instead it was usually, "Hey Dad, here's one I'll bet you've never seen before."

I knew who the "one" was: an eight-legged member of the arachnid family.

Then the fun would begin. "How many eyes does it have, and, male or female?" The answer would come back, "Looks like eight, yep, it's a male, and it's here on the seat of my bicycle... or, as the kids got older, "on the steering wheel of my car."

It was the same way with insects, birds, snakes and other animals we share this grand old earth with. When Sue and I were helping Rick and Connie Hewitt run the "Hummingbird Capital of the World," The Nature Conservancy's Ramsey Canyon Preserve in Southeast Arizona, it was the

same way with snakes and spiders.

My oldest son, Dean was going to high school just down the canyon in the city of Sierra Vista and had a blast. His responsibility at the preserve was to keep all the hummingbird feeders full. On his route he'd often run into those huge orb web spiders' webs between feeders and watch the BIG Sonoran wolf spiders scampering about under his feet.

I always thought all those beautiful "Charlottes" were on speaking terms with the pig-like javelinas who occupied "Wilbur's" niche. How lucky can you get! I just can't imagine what Dean had to go through on his tour of duty when he and his F-16 were flying combat in Iraq; all that new wildlife!

There's a huge, platter-sized cousin of spiders living over there which is closely related to what people in Arizona know as the "Sun Spider," which is actually a solpugid. It has eight legs, but no venom. However, in the Iraq countryside it's an enormous, platter-sized solpugid the natives have named the "camel spider," and believe you me, it's a very cranky-looking beast.

You, my wonderful readers, have never complained about the many pieces I've written in my column on the wonders of spiders, so imagine my wonder and delight last week when I walked into *The Nugget* office to resupply my butterscotch candy and pass the time of day with Teresa (who's the keeper of the candy among other duties) and was greeted

by Karen Keady who said, "Oh, Jim, I can't thank you enough for the kind words you've shared with everyone about spiders." Needless to say, I was glowing. It isn't every day you have someone thank you for writing something nice about spiders.

My poor wife, Sue has been putting up with me and spiders for 40 years, and the only time she loses patience with me (about spiders at least) is when she catches me putting the bathtub spiders in the closet.

"Outside!" she'll shout, repeating, "not in the closet!" over and over. But in spite of her orders, I manage to get many of them in the clothes closet to feed on clothes moths and other cotton-eaters.

Now, here's some news if you don't want those Charlotte orb webs on your back porch or by the garage door. Personally, when I see the moths and flies trapped in orb webs and eaten by the Charlottes, I shout for joy! It will never be necessary to spread chemicals around if you have a Charlotte or two in your backyard.

But if you're feeding the numbers of nuthatches and chickadees — as I'm doing — there's a good chance you won't have any orb-weavers or sheet web spiders I once had. Watching those two bird species working the eaves and tiny crooks and crannies of my house really impresses me. They are working over those spider niches like nobody's business, and I'm sure not a spider can survive such intense searches.

And, speaking of birds



PHOTO BY SUE ANDERSON

Grandsons Daxon and Graham, brainwashed by their grandfather to think of spiders as friends, not enemies.

and spiders, Jess Draper at *The Nugget* has an 11-year-old daughter, Daisy, who is a Junior Naturalist of considerable skills. This is a note Jess sent me:

"The other day, Daisy asked me to come get 'Fred' — one of the gigantic reddish brown spiders that often show up in my basement — from her room because he's is just too large for comfort. So I go get him in a container and set him on the

kitchen table while we have breakfast.

"Everybody has a good laugh over how big Fred is, and Daisy is talking about him like he's an old pet. After we eat, Daisy takes the container out front and let Fred go in the grass... Immediately a bird swoops down and carries Fred off right in front of her.

"Now she wants any future spiders released outside after dark."

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