

## Spider Diary Winter 2008

Tuesday, 02 December 2008

Last Updated Tuesday, 10 March 2009

Hey Spider fans, long time no see... Contrary to all available evidence, the diaries have not 'stopped'. They have been rather 'paused', and in this diary update, I shall explain why, and update you all with selected and various happenings in Spider-land in the last 4 or 5 months. This is going to be a first for the diaries in that there are no photos or video this time round - this is something more of a 'reflective essay' which, whilst telling you what's been going on, will also try and explain my most recent thoughts about spiders, my changing relationship with them, their mortality, whether it is right to cage them, and a few other issues that all T-keepers must surely deal with, but don't necessarily document. It is my hope that what I lack this time round in flashy multimedia, I might make up for by sharing with my fellow keepers some overall thoughts and personal experiences. Of course, it may be no help to anyone, so if you think this might bore you to death to read my extended ramblings, please feel free to ignore this update ! But anyway...where shall I start? 4 Spiders have died in my care in my care now, and with each death I find myself wondering how or if I could have prevented it, or asking myself if it was things I did that caused that death. Then we get into the thorny issue of 'is it right to impose this life on Tarantulas', or indeed any other animal... So, Blue (*E.cyanognathus*) was the first to go - definitely my fault - I left the tank open, she took the opportunity to leave and then probably injured herself in the climb down to floor level. This being my first spider death, and clearly my fault was doubly upsetting, and as regular diary reader will know, I felt the need to make tribute videos, extensively analyse what happened with a view to not repeating mistakes, and generally being rather sad that I inadvertently caused the early demise of that animal. For the first time, there were elements of spider keeping I did not enjoy. 2 months later, just before the diaries 'paused', little Whizz, my young *P.Subfusca* also expired, for no reason that I could see at all. One day she was fine, the next she looked slightly slow, and the next day she was dead, and I was mortified. This was a big part of why the diaries stopped, not because I am afraid of reporting bad news, or even my own mistakes and errors of judgement, but rather because it stemmed my enthusiasm for spider-keeping to quite some extent, and made me feel really not sure about whether it is right to keep these animals as we do, and also whether I am in any position at all to be writing a web site about them given that the evidence might suggest that I am perhaps not the greatest spider keeper. This bothers me. And it gets worse.

A few short weeks later, and to my utter astonishment, little Blaze, my baby *Megaphobema robustum*, was also discovered in his burrow, with his legs curled under him. I don't think I can put into words just how disappointing this was, or how shitty I felt about my abilities as a spider keeper. To lose yet another in such a short space of time was rather distressing, to say the least. She (sic) had made it as far as 5th moult, and despite being extremely reclusive, had made her burrow against the side of the tank, where I could see her, and she was fine, running away at hyperspeed from light sources, eating well, popping out for the occasional drink - all looked great. And then one day, I check, and she's gone, and I've failed another one.

Spider-keeping wise, this was my lowest point, but as I write this, several months, later, I find my enthusiasm returning, possibly fueled not only by a love and deep appreciation for the beauty of the animals themselves, but perhaps now also by a need to learn from mistakes, and do things better.

And then we skip a few weeks forward, and now Fluffy has died, my mature male *L.striatus*, the first of what I may reasonably assume to be a 'natural' death. Consequently, his expiring did not cause as much of an emotional response in me because he had reached the end of his days relatively naturally, and without outside interference from me directly causing it. But I cannot let myself off the hook so easily, because there is no denying the fact that this spider spent the last 5 months of its life persistently, and almost constantly trying to leave his tank, in search of a female that I was simply unable to find for him. And not for want of trying. It caused me great difficulty to have to watch his futile efforts every day, and on many occasions I felt a need to let him out to wander the house just so that he might feel he was actually making some progress ! Of course that sounds utterly ridiculous, and pre-supposes all sorts of highly unlikely brain functions and emotional responses can be attributed to the spider, which in reality, and based entirely upon reason, quite probably can't. Of course I didn't let him out - I didn't want to allow him the opportunity to fall, or meet the newly-moved-in cat, and even following the twisted emotional faux-logic of assuming his frustration might be eased, I was faced with the inevitability of knowing he would never find a female no matter how much wandering he was allowed to do ! Interestingly, the practical safety concerns of releasing him house-wide for myself, and the other human living here, Lisa, were almost non-existent compared to the other factors, which I take to be an indication that I have now been around spiders long enough, and have witnessed enough about their behaviour to not be remotely worried that one posed me any threat at all, were it to be allowed general house release. So there is another thing about spider-keeping that causes me disquiet, and another thing I have not enjoyed witnessing, or being responsible for. This series of deaths has somewhat dampened my enthusiasm for keeping, and recently I have found myself watching them less and less, taking less interest at feeding time, and not feeling the need to take lots of photos and video of them. True, I have been busy with work, and music, and graphics, and web sites, but none of these things are the main reason the site went without updates for so long... But its certainly not all bad, even with my other mature males. Legz, who does truly seem content and happy in his new tank does not wander all day / night trying to escape, and seems more content to wait for females to come to him. I have so far failed to find him a female in the UK, but I continue to try, and his calm and unstressed behaviour doesn't stress me either. In between the 2 extremes of Legz and Fluffy we find Tenebrus, my mature male *P.irminia*. He's still reclusive, and doesn't wander as much as Fluffy did, but when he does, I still find it makes me uncomfortable to watch him try. He does, however seem to realise the futility of his escaping missions, so intersperses them with long hours of resting, sitting very still, and doing the other things more contented T's do. He is beautiful, as ever, and I will miss him when he departs, which is looking like being fairly soon. So there ends my extended thoughts on what has been going wrong, and why. Good to get these things out in the open, and up for discussion with other keepers... Let's catch up very

briefly with everyone else. there has been lots going on, and far too much to even summarize here, so I'll be doing a proper catchup in the next full diary, which is already being written... ZBD, our favourite Adult female genic is moulting as I type, and has successfully escaped her previous self, and now lies in the throes of exhaustion following her ordeal. She's been on her back 3 hours now, and I am monitoring carefully, and expect her to be back on her feet in a few more hours. Other than that, she's doing great, and seems, to all intent to be a calm and content spider. She has helpfully exited her exuvium in such a way that it will make a wonderful display piece and has all the legs outstretched, as so often isn't the case... Legz had a brief excursion into the open the other day, but tends to stay hidden now mostly, even at night. As he is on his last legs (no pun intended) I have given him an extra heatmat by his burrow, which is probably why he stays there. Ginny, remains the epitome of spider lucidity, and eats well, walks well, and almost never tries to escape these days... she'll be due for a tank change soon, I think, as will Zebs, who deserves a much bigger one. Flash (A.versicolor) is also very happy, and expanded his / her (still don't know) burrow very much tank-wide. Almost full size now, she (for the sake of argument) is an absolute sweetie, and a joy to keep... Binky, our large L.para, he of the recently regrown leg has moulted again, and now has a pretty much perfect replacement for the slightly reduced functionality version he had beforehand, so all good there. He's also been featuring (nee 'starring') in brain function research for Cambridge University (for the duration of which he was immaculately behaved), but we'll get to all that next month when we do a proper update. Next up in our quick resume must be Boots, who, goddammit, moulted male about a month ago ! Famous as I may be, for not caring if my charges are male or female, if there was just ONE spider for whom I may have harboured dark and secret hopes for femaleness, it was him. He is truly wonderful in colouration and temperament now, and also doesn't seem to feel the need to leave his tank or go a-wandering, but those tibial spurs give he game away, so I'm now looking for female C.cyaneopubescens up for a mating experience with my little guy. He's fit and healthy, and ready for love action. And who does that leave ? Just a very little one, who you don't know about yet. I'll introduce her next time round, I think... So that's it from me, and the (now only) 56 legs that still live with me for another update, and I will be back soon to start some 'proper' updates, packed full of media, photos and other spider-goodies. But that's all from us, so catch you next time... B, Z, F, T, G, L, B, ?, and me