

## EP75 - Harvestmen with Meg Skinner

Would you like to introduce yourself and explain what you do, Meg? Hello. So yeah, my name's Meg Skinner. I am an ecologist by trade. I grew up in the Cotswolds in the countryside, and I've kind of always been interested in wildlife. In the past sort of seven or eight years, I was more focused on invertebrates.

I started like recording and looking at invertebrates when I was at university, mostly kind of Beetles and moths to start off with. Later developed an interest in insects and now I run the recording scheme for Harvestmen as part of the technological society. Oh, fantastic. We always like to start with our recent wildlife sightings.

Have you got a recent wildlife sighting? High. Fairly recent. Yeah. It's nothing particularly outstanding, but it's a lot I like to chat about. So, a couple of weeks ago I was going to do a field recorder day in London and at the train station I saw Hummingbird Hawk. Which is something that's fairly common.

They're kind of widespread all over the country. But it, it was just something that I wasn't really expecting and it came along and sort of wisdom front of me hovering away as they do in the little garden. And that's a species that people send me a lot of photos and videos of thinking, What the hell is this thing

Yeah. Does it, is it a bird? Is it, you know, do we have hopping birds in Britain? Yeah. They're just something that's quite distinctive and quite. When I got to London as well, I saw quite a large population of a fairly rare harvestman. I saw a nice little day for me. Yeah. Oh love. It's quite funny when you read old Hummingbird Hawk Murphy, Embr Hummingbird and you think How ridiculous.

And you see it and go, Oh, see what they mean now? Exactly. Yeah. It always tends to be like a beer garden and things. Those sort of, Of the valer and the bud ear and things. Yeah. But is it for Beener and Valerian? I think they go for it, isn't it? I've got both of them. My garden, it's been a really good year for in the UK and I haven't seen a single one in my garden, of course,

Oh no, there you go. I'm sure I've probably not been out there at the right time knowing me. I like that sort of thing. Yeah. My recent sightings are somewhat limited cuz I recorded last podcast four days ago and I haven't been out the house. I'm ashamed to say apart from to pick up my kid. Oh, sorry, . The sightings gonna have to be the massive cellar spider.

That was one of the rooms in my house and she was a bit of a Butte. She was a bit of a, but she's a nice, nice big one. Oh really? Might. Find some little babies there and then if she's so big, there's a brilliant picture on online. Someone posted the other day going, Oh my good spider's been doing its job.

It's caught all these flies and someone's going that. It's actually, it's baby . You're about to be swamped . It's amazing how they get by there. Cause you never, I dunno, I don't really find that I've got many flies and things in my flat, but I've still got quite a good population of them in the bathroom.

Well, we came to the Fury at my N's house where there was loads of them that they were eating each other. And it was one of those . Yeah, possibly. Yeah, . And they eat the house spiders. The giant house spiders, don't they? So I always tell Rack Noobs to put up with them because they take the big hairy ones out.

could have been the bigger ones. Instead it's that time of year, the big ones go roaming around. So you probably see some of them at some point too. I've only seen one or two and I think the cell spiders have something to do with that. But . So you are here to talk all about Harvestmen, which are probably the forgotten reckon group I think, aren't they?

Everyone? Ticks and spiders and scorpions, , but poor old harvestmen get looked over. So could you explain what is a harvestman? And I hate to compare 'em to spiders, which always overshadows everything else, but how do they differ from spiders? Yeah, sure. That's always the question I get asked and people often call them harvest spiders and don't realize that it's actually a separate thing.

Harvestmen are eds like spiders. They're in their own little group. It's the audio. They look at them. The main difference is that spiders have their body divided into two segments. So they've got the abdomen, which is separate, that's where the silk's produced, and then they've got their sth, orac, which is the rest of their body, which is where their eyes are, and their legs are joined up.

So two different separate bits. They've also got eight legs coming out of there. Harvestmen have one body segment, so they just look like one big blob with eight legs coming out. That's the main sort of difference to look at. Harvest men also don't build webs in the same way that spiders. They eat slightly differently so they don't feed on liquid prey and they don't wrap it up in silk or anything like that.

They also have two eyes on the top of their head, rather than eight eyes or sometimes six eyes that spiders have, they make slightly differently as well. So with spiders, the males have these kind of modified PLPs at the front of their body, which look like little books and gloves, and they're quite specific to the different species's got certain shape to it, which Haman don't have any of that.

They kind of. Do things a bit more normally as we would. They were also well known as Daddy Long legs, which you've mentioned a little bit in the Crane flies episode. I know somebody said that crane flies are often called daddy long legs. It's the same with harvest, mint, and spiders. So they do resemble those cellar spiders that you find in the corner of your room.

But yeah, like I said, the one body segment is the main thing to distinguish them. And Daddy Longs could cover any of these animals. Harvestmen are their own thing. They should be called harvestmen and they're not spiders. Do we know what the origin of the name Harvestman is? Is it sounds to do with when people see 'em when they were harvesting or something?

Yeah, pretty much. Often active and mature around sort of late summer, like in the harvest season, they were usually seen as a symbol of like good luck or good fortune. So if you still at Harvestman, that means you have a good harvest. There's quite a lot of sort of old wive tales surrounding them as well.

I know a lot of languages of the rough flood translation of the word harvestman means like shepherd spiders. Back in the day, people used to walk around on stilts when they were herding sheep, like the shepherds would walk around on these big stilts so that they could kind of cross uneven ground and keep an eye on their frock.

I think some ent of that kind of resembled harvestman on these long sticky legs . So that might also be where they get their name from, like Shepard Spider. Oh, nice. Oh, that makes sense. How many types of Harvestman are there in the uk? Because we've got a few recent arrivals on top of the originals, haven't we?

Yeah, so there's around 32 species in the uk. . There are some species that we've seen historically in the UK that are very rapidly declining, possibly not being very well recorded, but it does seem that other species are being quite well recorded. There's one, a genius, for example, that one of the species is very rapidly becoming more widespread and more common, while another member of the same genius is declining as well.

So we're seeing these changes and distribu. Changing and like potentially invasive species coming over as well. There is one species called liban species A, It's been described as so far cause it's not actually properly named. It's one that's been becoming really common in Europe and considered invasive species in European countries.

That's been recorded a couple years ago in like Share York. And other records are cropping up all over the country. So we are seeing quite a few changes in recent years for the Harvestman fauna in Britain. So it's all good enough, It's all going on. Now you've touched on how they're different from spiders with not building webs and how spiders liquitize their pre before they eat.

So how do Harvestmen feed and what do they eat? Harvestmen pretty much eat anything. They're. Brilliant predators by no means they're like dragonflies. They're not amazingly specialized at finding and hunting food. They kind of just eat whatever they can come across. Tubman do predate certain things, so worms, snails, spring tails, other small like invertebrates in the soil, but they also feed on like fungi or fallen fruit and carry in as well.

So a little bit of everything. Whatever they can kind of get their mouth parts on. They do eat very differently Byers, so they kind of eat more like crab. They've got these structures called PLPs at the front of their body or pals, and that's kind of like a very. Pair of legs that they can use to kind of handle things or move past things towards their body.

And then they've got mouth pots underneath those, which are like little crab claws, which are called Lyra. And they used to kind of rip up food or pass it into their mouth a little bit more like a crab so they can kind of eat whatever they can rip up and, and find that they consider edible anyway. I know spiders use their pouch a bit like an harvestmen.

Have anything like that going on? Good question. So harvestmen, they're the second pair of legs from the front of their body. So they've got eight legs, four pairs of legs. So if you count the first one at the front of the body, it's the second one from the front of the body. That's the pair of legs that they don't really walk on.

They're often. Like longer than the rest of their legs and they kind of tap them on the ground a little bit. Like antennae another species of like insects and things. They have really good chemo receptors at the end of their equivalent of their feet. So they can sort of smell their way along. They basically kind of smell with those legs.

And. That can be useful to find their prey or to sort of find each other, I suppose. Cuz their eyesight really isn't that great. . Yeah. They've only got two, not six eyes. Exactly. It's more like light and dark and movements and things rather than, you know, the sophisticated spider eyes that they have.

Very, very simple eyes. So what is it about harvest when you find so interesting? I think probably because Harvestman have always been there for people. I think when you show someone a photo of Homan, they're, Oh yeah, Daddy Langs. Oh yeah, Harvestman. I know exactly what that is. Most people have seen them, you know, as children, as adults, kind of in the garden of things.

They've always been kicking around. But I just think not many people know much about them. And before I started doing recordings again, I didn't really know much about them. And they're just kind of odd , weirdly wonderful. You know, they've got funny behaviors sometimes. You don't really expect from such a simple, you know, quotes, simple invertebrate, and they can kind of aggregate in large clusters, which is like considered a.

Method to avoid predation. You can see in some species and tropical species, they show maternal care and some interesting like courtship behavior as well. So just think they're very much overlooked, like you said earlier. But they are quite interesting when you actually look at them, especially, you know, under a handlings or under the microscope.

They've got these weird like spikes and patterns and these funny little eyes on top of their head. I dunno. Just think there's. Funny charm to them. Yeah, that's pretty cool. There is something nice about knowing stuff about a group that isn't that well known. So they're just completely overlooked, aren't they, really?

Yeah, exactly. And you know, any, any little observation could be something that we don't really know about them before. So you just mentioned some behaviors and stuff, I guess like lots of invertebrates. They've got a whole range of adaptations for surviving, finding mates and stuff like that. Is there any particularly good ones you'd want to.

Yeah, for example, I'll just used some examples from the UK Harvestmen. There's species called mega burnes edema, if that's how you pronounce it, . And they are really, really good at camouflage. They often overlook because they're so hard to find. They've got kind of this executive model pattern on their back and quite a lot of different spikes, so it kind of breaks up the outline of them.

And they are often found in like mossy, sort of woodland with like lots of lichen. So a main thing is camouflage for them, like I mentioned before. Harvestman can use that second pair of legs on. Just obviously a really good adaptation, especially if they're in the undergrowth or somewhere dark or somewhere they can't really see their way around very well.

There's a lot we don't know about them like chemically as well cuz harvestmen can secrete chemicals for kind of a defense mechanism against predators, which is again, something we can't really understand that well without kind of studying their behavior. But it got sort of repel predators from, especially from large groups of them as well.

So that's an adaptation. Another species in the UK as well. It's got a really cool like method of catching. So on the inside surface of their PLPs, they kind of fold up. They've got these really long, big spikes like baggers and they can kind of help them like grasp onto food. I dunno if they use them to.

Sort of ipa, the food and Kill when they're pred predicting things or whether it's just to hold it there while they're feeding. But it kind of acts like a little cage and pulls them towards them. So that was quite a cool thing to see. Anyway, that's Platy Buns. Piney Toum definitely has that one. So I go and Google that and have a look at those cuz they're really, really cool looking.

Don't have a question to put you on a spot with, Do you have a favorite species? Could you possibly pick a favorite one? Yeah I do. that will. Than what's he likely won. Mega Budds edema, sometimes known as the crown harvestman. People have given it their name cuz around its eyes. His eyes are like on top of its body and around its eyes has got these really big spikes that look like massive sort of like a crown or massive sort of fake eye lashes or something, and it's just spiky all over.

It's got these cool camouflage patterns and they can reproduce that mat, which is quite cool if they want to. There's not many males within the population. Males do exist, but they can kind of be independent. They don't necessarily need to fertilize their offing, so they look cool. And then they're a feminist icon.

Yeah. They're just cool to look out for. At least . They are cool looking things. So moving on to the recording scheme, have you had any cool findings or results from the records you've been sent in? Yeah, so. The recording scheme is sort of system for collecting records of harvestmen all over the country and organizing those records into, you know, distribution maps.

We're trying to find out which species live where, what sort of habitats they prefer, and just raise the profile of harvestmen in general and kind of tell people about them through things like this so that people can go out and have a look at them if they want to. They can send us records and we can verify them and let them know a little bit more information about 'em.

They can let us know bit more information about. Yeah, that's kind of how the, all the new species that I know about that have come to the UK have found out through the recording scheme. So it's literally just people sending in their records and observations like, Oh, found this fun orange thing that's turned up in Plymouth.

What is this? It looks like it could be a harvestman that's been found on Europe, and that was Scott A Lemon Dore, which is a species that's just found in one very small area of Plymouth and go. And that was just from people sending in their observations. So we're always finding out more about things and like behavior and distributions and all sorts of things.

So yeah, according scheme is part of, as I mentioned before, the British Technological Society, and that's a charity that aims to promote awareness of British Iraq NS and maintain these data sets of records and just show people a bit more information about Iraqs in general. We don't just cover harvest when we don't just cover spiders.

We cover. Those things as well as pseudo scorpions as well. So a little bit of everything around the uk. If anyone wants to get involved, they can become a BAS member and we send out a newsletter every now and then. We send out a journal as well so you can find out a bit more much what's going on in the world of Iraq.

Its all around the world as well as the uk and we try to organize events all around the country to kind of get people recording, get people meeting up, and just like offer information about different species as. So if you don't wanna get involved, you can become a member or just, you know, by finding out more about this on our website or by getting in touch on our social media platforms.

So, can people submit records through our record? Yes, I accept records. Zero record. Harvestman are quite good in that respect because, for example, spiders, a lot of the time you need to examine specimens to figure out what they are. Cause you need to look at, you know, close microscopic features. Oh, it's pretty much most of them can be identified on photos.

Some of them can be identified on really, really bad photos, so yeah, please do submit any records that you have on I. We've got quite a few people verifying on there as well, including myself. So we do like to kind of comment on people, especially if people aren't getting the right IDs. We can give them a little bit of feedback or give them a little bit of guidance and help them look at features that they might have missed or, you know, might be getting a little bit muddled up with.

So do put a photo on there as well, if you can, and any, any information you'd like to offer is really useful. People want a id Harvestman, Did I say there's a new key come out recently or new fold out guide? There is, yes. Yeah. Yeah. There's a, a thought up chart from the fsc from the Field Studies Council, and that's been produced and it's literally just come out this year, so that's got quite a few of the new species on there as well.

Loads of information about all the different features you want to use to ID them and some really good photos as well. So that's, yeah, that's the new key from Paul Richards, definitely worth getting. And it's about three pounds, 75, so absolutely bargain. Yeah. I've got the old one and this new one. I'm gonna get the new one now.

Got one new one. Yeah. So a few missing on the old one. I remember Nick Baker recommended the old one. So if someone wants to identify a harvestman, what's the best thing to do? What, what, what sort of angles do they take photos from and. Yeah, so always take photos if you can. Preferably like a top down, like a top down photo, just to get the sort of whole body in and the eyes.

And then a photo from the front would be really beneficial, especially if you can go and get the PLPs in and like the front of, front of the body and the eyes. That would be really useful. So where can people find you and the British and ecological society on social media, et cetera? Ok, so a big platform that we have for our social media is, Well, the BAS is on Twitter at British Spiders.

Obviously they cover everything, not just spiders, but that's just an easier name, . So at British Spiders, they often, you know, tag me and retweet me on the HARVESTMAN stuff. So I'll generally reply on my personal account, which is at Megabus, the Crown Harvestman. So do you kind of follow both of us if you wanna learn about everything?

We do kind of share each other's posts as well. There's also a Facebook page called UK Harvestman in brackets, a pones, but you can probably find it on UK Harvestman. And that's one I set up many years ago because I didn't know



anything about Harvestman and I was hoping that people would go on there and tell me about Harvestman.

But now you know, there's quite a lot of people that are really active on there. It's a really good source. Of recent sightings, have you found something you're like, Oh, I dunno what it is I'm looking at? The chart might be quite a few different ones. You can see what people are finding at that exact time of year.

Post your photos, ask questions. There's loads of resources on there. There's, you know, everyone's really helpful. So def definitely recommend joining that one. And the BS website has got loads of information including sort of fact sheets events that we're organizing, a bit about membership, and there's like a member's area as well.

If you join up, you get some extra resources. And we've recently started a YouTube channel, well, in the past few years for a YouTube. Which has got a few videos that I've been making on like survey techniques. We've got loads of videos on talks as well. So every time we have a meeting and we have some guest speakers, we'll record those and put those on YouTube and there should be some videos coming out again soon.

So yeah, do subscribe to that and keep an eye out. Well, thanks so much for that, Nicholas. Be really interesting. I have to admit. I'm as guilty as many overlooking the poor Harvestman. We should, especially if you're recording like that, like a great side group, you know, there's only sort of 30 yard species and if you're recording say Beatles or something, at the end of the summer when everything's dying down, Harvest one are coming up and yeah, there's think there are a good side project anyway.

There's always lots to learn. Yeah. So there'll still be plenty around in October won. Yeah. Yeah. Some of the species persist well into the winter, especially some of the, the newer ones that have come out from overseas. We've got, yeah, Dro purposes, Lavas as well, which is one that's cropped up in the past few years.

That tends to mature around like February time, which is quite unusual, but I'm hoping that, you know, we'll get some more records in now. People are kind of looking for it at that time of year. So, yeah, never Renee. Well, thanks so much for coming on and talking about your favorite little group of Iraq Ns.

There were, Yes, thanks for having me. Little thing, and now well send me a records . I'd like to know if, if you find anything interesting, let me know. , go

follow the British Ecological Society. Don't transact too quickly. And Meg on Twitter and go send all your records in. That's what you want you to do. We would like to encourage recording on this podcast.

Well, thanks very much. Thank you. Well, that's all from us guys. See in the next show.