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Observation of Apparent "Parental Care" of Eggs by a Juvenile *Azilia vachoni* (Araneae: Tetragnathidae)

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Spiders exhibit varying degrees of parental care of immatures, varying from none (most species) to third instar spiderlings occupying their maternal web which is seen in the semi-social tarantula *Ischnothele caudata* of the family Dipluridae (Simon) (Jantschke and Nentwig 2001), to the most social spider species *Anelosimus eximus* (Keyserling). Here I report observations on retreats of the northern South American tetragnathid *Azilia vachoni* (Caporiacco) containing eggs and an individual in its second or third instar.

The favoured microhabitat occupied by adult and semi-adult *A. vachoni* is the semi-open space found between buttress roots (Sewlal 2009). Other favoured microhabitats observed for this species include between the forest floor and fallen logs or tree hollows (Sewlal, pers. obs.).

These observations were carried out in the Arena Forest Reserve, Trinidad, West Indies (10°34'N, 61°14'W).

Observations were made on 13 individuals, whose orb webs were orientated either vertically (85%) or horizontally (15%) between the leaves of *Philodendron* sp. vines ascending two tree trunks. However, the hubs were suspended from retreats giving the webs a conical appearance. The retreats were also conical in shape and were made of loose granular debris.

Webs of this form were observed on two trees. The trunk of the first tree was occupied by 38 retreats starting at approximately 0.3 m above ground level and covering a vertical distance of one metre up the trunk, while the second tree had 13 retreats starting at 0.6 m from ground level and covering over about two metres. Further webs and retreats were noticed higher up. However, not all webs and retreats were recorded as they were too high for all of the details to be accurately described by the collector.

Out of a total of 13 webs sampled, in all except two webs, spiders occupied the retreat. Four retreats were collected and placed in vials containing 70% alcohol. Dissection of these retreats revealed them to contain between six to 11 eggs. The retreats also contained a female which was either a second or third instar. The female appeared not to be the mother of the eggs and it is not obvious if it is an older sister of those eggs or an individual that wandered into the retreat.

Many spider species perform a pattern of maternal behaviour referred to as "egg sac guarding" which consists of the females staying close to the egg sac during its

incubation period (Horel and Gundermann 1992), which are recorded from a range of families (Fink 1987). The presence of the individuals of *A. vachoni* in these retreats and its inclusion in the web design suggest that these individuals were carrying out this behaviour. It is also possible that other retreats contained other individuals but abandoned them when disturbed during the recording process. This species is very sensitive to disturbance and had been noticed to drop from its web due to slight disturbances like blowing on its web (Sewlal, pers. obs.).

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