



## Don't Move!

Do you remember back to the first A Story A Week of this year? I wrote about the spiders who were taking up residence outside my workshop window in the summer; every year a new big yellow and black one, that grows fat on the insects that stumble into her web after having been attracted to my workshop window by the bright light hanging over the workbench. It is now early September, and - according to the typical pattern of spider life I have observed each year - there should be a nice plump one hanging in a large and complex web just outside the window to my left.

But this year there is nothing there. A spider did colonize that space a couple of months ago, but along the way there was a tragic event, and she did not survive. Those large *joro-gumo* make quite complicated webs; in addition to the main web for catching insects, they build a skein of outlying webs around it. I have read in a nature book that the purpose of the outlying webs is to slow down large insects so that they can be trapped in the inner web, but I believe this is incorrect, as I have never observed that behaviour. What I have observed - on many an occasion - are birds coming in close and trying to pluck the spider from her perch at the center of her web. But because they don't want to get tangled in the outlying strands, they can't quite get close enough to catch her.

All last summer I watched the local flock of *hiyodori* try many times to catch the spider that was here, and they always failed. They cannot hover well - not like a hummingbird - and it was quite entertaining to see them flapping madly, trying to hold themselves in one spot and maneuver past the threads. I could see their frustration at not being able to catch the juicy morsel!

This year though, the spider resident in that spot was a bit careless with her web building, not making a complicated protective barrier, but just stretching a few threads here and there. And she paid the price for her laziness a couple of weeks ago. As I watched one morning, a *hiyodori* came close, saw a chance, and made a sudden lunge. He was successful, and that was the end of the spider.

It hasn't though, been the end of my spider-watching this summer. High up on one of the workshop windows, a small spider of a type I can't identify has built a web ... on the inside. I think this spider too, is not so smart, because although there are always many insects flying around the outside of these windows, there are of course very few inside. I was a bit worried that she would starve to death, but a few days ago I had an idea. I had just swatted a mosquito buzzing around my head, and thought that it would be a good idea not to let this 'food' go to waste; so I dropped it onto the web, and watched to see what would happen.

Nothing. The spider did react at the moment of contact, but then - after a few seconds of tentative exploration around the dead mosquito - completely ignored it and returned to her waiting station. It seems that without the struggle and movement that is normally present when an insect is trapped in the web, she can't recognize that this is food. Well, you know what I had to do next ... yes, when the next mosquito came along, I had to try and swat it lightly enough to stun it, but not kill it. This was difficult, but I did manage to get one, and when I dropped the slightly wriggling insect into the web, was rewarded by seeing it quickly wrapped up and 'invited' for dinner.

This has been a good learning experience for me. I know now that if I am ever trapped in a horror movie, and faced with a gigantic spider coming to eat me, all I have to do is 'play dead', and it will leave me alone. Useful knowledge!

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