

Clapping and sidestepping key to spider mating dance

August 26 2015, by Lisa Morrison



Maratus personatus. Credit: Jurgen Otto

Spiders terrify many people but one man's passion for a flamboyant creepy crawly with captivating courtship rituals is converting arachnophobes to arachnophiles, one amusing video at a time.

Jurgen Otto has been obsessed with publicising peacock spiders since starting to photograph the males' mesmerising mating dance moves in

2008.

Dr Otto and fellow spider researcher David Hill have named 21 of the 39 confirmed peacock spider species, including the most recently described *Maratus personatus*, which was published in *Peckhamia* journal on July 28.

M. personatus, derived from the Latin word for masked after its striking blue face, measures 4mm and is only known to occur at Cape Riche, about 120km northeast of Albany.

Dr Otto snapped 'blueface' in 2013 after learning of its existence and location from Perth naturalist David Knowles.

The German-born 50-year-old collected some specimens and returned to his Sydney 'spider room', which contains more than 100 live arachnids, where he captured the mesmerising dance used to seduce females.

Each peacock spider species has a different courtship display involving moving their third pair of elongated legs while producing vibrations to woo potential mates.



Maratus Personatus are roughly 4mm in size. Credit: Jurgen Otto

M. personatus' signature style involves moving quickly from side to side while wildly waving its legs, which appear to clap overhead.

Dr Otto finds their behaviour captivating.

"It is quite a spectacular thing happening on such a small scale that it is almost unbelievable," he says.

"Spiders are things people usually consider scary and squash."

Dr Otto's videos of peacock spiders have become an online phenomenon, popularising the eensy-weensy arachnids, which have been heralded as 'the cutest spiders in the world' by adoring fans.

His YouTube channel, [Peacockspiderman](#), has more than 8.7 million views and almost 12,000 subscribers, while his *Maratus personatus* clip has more than 904,000 views.



Maratus Personatus. Credit: Jurgen Otto

His [Flickr](#) site has 1600 followers and his [Facebook](#) page almost 7000.

Dr Otto's videos have also spawned parodies featuring spiders boogying to Beyonce's Single Ladies, Daft Punk's Get Lucky, YMCA and Everybody Dance Now and altered to include spiders shaking it with maracas and light sabres.

He hopes to change people's negative perceptions of spiders.

"When you say spider people say yuck I hate [spiders](#) but these are cute and colourful," Dr Otto says.

"They appear similar to puppies or kittens in the way they tilt their head, push themselves up on their legs and do everything you would expect dogs and cats to do.

More information: "Maratus personatus, a masked peacock spider from Cape Riche, Western Australia (Araneae: Salticidae: Euophryinae)." *Peckhamia* 127.1, 28 July 2015, 1—30 .
peckhamia.com/peckhamia/PECKHAMIA_127.1.pdf

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