

Perseverance pays off with peacock spiders

July 19 2016, by Lisa Morrison, Sciencenetwork Wa



A male peacock spider *Maratus mungaich* displaying to a female. Credit: Jurgen Otto

Seven new species of spiders, whose kin have taken the world by storm with their adorable appearance and mesmerising dance moves, have been discovered in WA and South Australia.

Sydney scientist Dr Jurgen Otto discovered the new *Maratus* peacock [spiders](#) with Perth naturalist David Knowles and described them with US-based spider expert Dr David Hill in international jumping spider journal *Peckhamia* in May.

Maratus albus, *M. bubo*, *M. lobatus*, *M. tessellatus*, *M. vespa*, *M. voltus* and *M. australis* bring the total number of described peacock spiders to 48—with at least 16 others awaiting formal classification.

Dr Otto says finding *M. bubo* near Walpole last year was an exciting case of mistaken identity.

"It was a sad trip in the beginning because we were looking for some [spiders] David knew about but unfortunately we didn't find any," he says.

"When we found *bubo* at that location, we were convinced it was one David had called hokey pokey before.

"We put them in vials and I flew back to Sydney but when I started to photograph them I saw in fact it wasn't hokey pokey—it was a completely different species."

Dr Otto says finding seven species, which have all been documented along WA's coast between Bunbury and Eyre Bird Research Station in the Goldfields, was "completely unexpected."



A juvenile *Maratus albus* on the tip of a pencil. Credit: Jurgen Otto

"I didn't expect a lot more to be out there in WA," Dr Otto says.

"WA seems to be very diverse for these spiders—probably more diverse than the east.

"I wonder now if there are more waiting to be found."

At 4mm long, the arachnids are tiny in size but have big personalities.

The males have captivating courtship displays, involving waving their arms in the air to woo the female, which looks like they are dancing.

Peacock spiders have become an online sensation since Dr Otto began sharing their endearing antics in 2011.



Sydney scientist Dr Jurgen Otto described seven new peacock spider species with US-based spider expert Dr David Hill in international jumping spider journal *Peckhamia* in May. Credit: Jurgen Otto

His Peacockspiderman Youtube channel has more than 11 million views and over 16,000 subscribers, while his Flickr site has 1900 followers and over 70,000 people like his Facebook page.

Dr Otto enjoys helping arachnophobes turn their fear into fascination.

"These tiny invertebrates are so different to peoples' experience of spiders, it turns their view upside down," he says.

"Now when people think of spiders they might not think of something black and scary and ugly that they are frightened of and want to squish.

"They might think of something small and cute and colourful and complex—this give the whole spider group a different appeal."

More information:

peckhamia.com/peckhamia/PECKHAMIA_141.1.pdf

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