

Jumping Spiders

The members of the San Saba Bird and Nature Club are regularly lavished with amazing photos taken by the skilled hand of fellow member, Terry Fischer. Recently the topic of conversation along with remarkable close up photos has been jumping spiders.

Jumping spiders (Salticids) are hairy and grow to approximately three quarters of an inch in length. The size of individual spiders shows great variability.

Salticids are the tigers among spiders. The spider slowly advances towards its prey. When it is at a reachable distance, it jumps on its prey and grabs it with its jaws. They use their third and/or fourth pair of legs for jumping. If you notice the spider on a wall, often the *Salticus scenicus*, it seems to mock at gravity. It jumps off the walls and falls back on it several inches further instead of falling down. This is because of its lifeline. If you watch the spider carefully, you will notice that it always releases a lifeline when it jumps. If the jump fails it can crawl back to its original position and it prevents the spider from falling down.

Jumping spiders do not make webs to catch prey. They do use a silken retreat of thick, white, slightly viscid silk in crevices, under stones on the ground, under bark or on the foliage and plants. Since the jumping spider is a sight hunter, it stays in its nest during nights and when the conditions for seeing prey are poor. The females lay their eggs in these retreats mostly in spring and summer.

The red-backed jumping spider (*Phidippus johnsoni*) is one of the largest and most commonly encountered jumping spiders of western North America. Both sexes have a bright red abdomen. The female has in addition a black central stripe. The chelicerae of both sexes are of a shining teal color caught so beautifully by Terry in his photos. The rest of the body is mostly black.

When threatened, the red-backed jumping spider can inflict a painful bite in self-defense, but with no serious medical consequences.

Most of the time they feed on prey about half their own size and are found to feed on a wide variety of insects including flies, bugs and moth caterpillars. They also prey heavily on spiders. I had a friend who used to put tiny bits of ground meat on a toothpick which was accepted by the jumping spiders who were happily living in her house.

Some of the photos taken by Terry involved the mating ritual. Before mating, the male walks toward the female and then backs away. He performs a kind of a zigzag dance, and some males are reported to produce a sound by twitching their abdomens while dancing. Sometimes the male is killed after mating. This behavior is referred to as sexual cannibalism.

To be part the fun and conversation you are invited to join the San Saba Bird and Nature Club and be included on their list serve. You can do this by contacting Jimma Byrd (byrdjimma13@gmail.com).

If like me you have been “trapped in a spider’s web” doing things that don’t necessarily feed your soul, then let’s all “Go outside and play!”