While many people do legitimately have arachnophobia, a fear of spiders that has been played up by society, spiders are actually fascinating and important creatures. While out walking the trails, pay attention to the spaces between grasses, flowers and among the leaves. Where there is a web, there is a spider. A close examination of a web, its patterns and intricacy of the design, can help identify the family of spiders that created it, as webs vary among different spiders.

**Orb weavers** are spiders that weave the intricate and amazingly strong spoked wheel web. An outer frame has spokes headed to the middle, while additional outlines parallel the outside border. These internal silks are sticky to help hold an insect once caught. These webs have to be able to withstand a fast flying insect headed straight into it. The strength of the silk and the design of the web help trap passing insects. There are dozens of genuses and thousands of species of orb weavers that come in all colors and sizes, but the most recognized ones are those with the larger, bulbous abdomens.

A garden spider or banana spider, the argiope is a big, beautiful, black and yellow spider. It too is in the orb weaver family but it adds an extra twist to the spoked wheel web – it puts a zig-zag pattern in it. Scientists speculate that this may help prevent birds from running into the web or help camouflage the spider when it sits on top of it. In any case, like all orb weavers, the argiope depends upon design, strong silk, and stickiness to catch its prey. It will then immediately rush to the caught insect, insert its venom and wrap the prey in silk. Later the spider will basically suck the insides of the insect out after they have liquefied due to the venom.

**Tangle web spiders**, also called cobweb spiders, chiefly belong to the family Theridiidae and are known for building three-dimensional space webs. The most well-known spiders in this family are the common house spider and the black widow. Tangled webs are meant to be a jumble of threads that insects cannot help but get caught up in. Struggling only ensnares the insect more securely in the sticky mess.

**Funnel weaving spiders** create just as their name implies, a funnel shaped web. They lie in wait inside their lair and if they feel a vibration on the outside, they rush out to bite their prey. In order for the spider to be successful, it must be a very fast runner. It is believed that the funnel also acts as safe place hidden from predators and a location for mating.

Spiders are important to ecosystems all over the world for their role in keeping insect prey populations in balance, as well as a food source for their predators. Rather than being afraid of the next spider you see, perhaps take a closer look and notice the intricacy of their webs and the beauty of the differently colored spiders. They really are fascinating creatures.

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**Spiders Shouldn’t Scare Us**

*by Education Program Coordinator Kim Compton*

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*Orb Weaver/Bob Graham*
Spiders Among Us

*Eeek! Spiders can give us the heebie-jeebies, but did you know that they are an important part of our world? Spiders help keep our insect pest populations in balance by using some insects for food. By helping control pest populations, this also helps keep unwanted diseases pests can carry under control. Learn more about the cool and unique characteristics of spiders with the activities down below.*

**Spider Webs**

Spiders have many ways for us to tell them apart. One way is by looking at the type of web they make. Just like with birds’ nests, not all webs are made the same way. Try to match the type of spider with the web it makes.

- **Common Cellar spider**
- **Black and Yellow Garden spider**
- **Orb Weaver**
- **Grass spider**

- **Orb web**
- **Funnel web**
- **Tangle web**
- **Orb web with zig-zag**

**Spider Scavenger Hunt!**

Now it’s time to go outside in your own yard or come to one of McHenry County Conservation District’s sites and go on a Spider Scavenger Hunt!

Here is your spider scavenger hunt check list:

- A spider with yellow on it’s body
- A spider with spots
- A spider web in the ground
- A spider with red on it’s body
- A spider web that looks like a bicycle wheel
- A spider web in the grass

- A spider on a tree
- A spider web with bugs in it
- A spider making its web
- An animal that would eat a spider
- A tiny spider
- A spider on the ground