

Antelope Island Spider Festival

Orb Weaver Spiders

Orb weaver spiders comprise the family Araneidae (ah-RAIN-KNEE-id-dee).

Orb weavers get their common name because they weave the “classical” **circular spider web**. It is usually classified by having concentric circles (smaller circles within larger ones) and spokes radiating out from the center of the web towards the anchor lines.



Orb weaver webs are sometimes called “**normal**” spider webs. In reality they are not the normal web type, **but one of many** types. While they can be abundant in some areas, such as Antelope Island State Park, they are not the most common web type found in most locations.

Orb weaver’s webs are **most commonly found** spun between tree branches, tall grasses, bushes, or near lights, in areas that have an **abundant** insect population.

Most species of orb weavers tend to build their webs **vertically**, but there are a couple that do build them horizontally.



Some species of orb weavers weave a **zig-zag pattern** through the center of their webs called a **stabilimentum** (sta-bil-i-men-tum). One of the possible reasons for this is to provide a place of camouflage for the juvenile spider.

Orb weavers tend to hang out in the **center** of their webs with their heads facing down.

There are ~3,500 species of orb weavers worldwide. About 180 of those occur in the USA and Canada.

The spider from E. B. White’s “**Charlotte’s Web**” was based off of an orb weaver spider.

The orb weaver spiders are one of the **most varied** families of spiders in both size and appearance.

Many orb weavers will reach larger sizes. The larger species **can exceed** a body length of 1”. While the smallest species **won’t even reach** ¼”.

Orb weavers tend to be very **colorful and noticeable**. Some even having incredibly elongated bodies, while other have more squat and rounded bodies. Many even grow what look like thorny projects from their abdomens.

Despite their bright colorations, orb weaver spiders are **not medically significant** to people or pets.

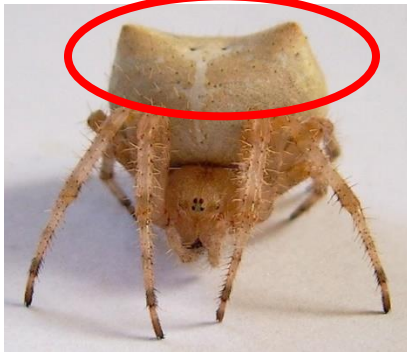
Orb weavers are an incredibly docile and non-aggressive group of spiders. They will **typically flee** at the first sign of danger to a safe shelter or hiding place usually on the edge of their webs somewhere.

Being bitten by orb weavers is **rare**, and usually occurs when they feel threatened and trapped, like when they are picked up and mishandled.

Being bitten by an orb weaver spider is **comparable** to getting stung by a bee.

Some of the common genera found in Utah are *Araneus* (uh-RAY-nee-uhs), *Argiope* (ahr-JY-oh-pee), and *Neoscona* (nee-oh-SKOH-nuh).

One of the more common representatives of *Araneus* in Utah is the *Araneus gemmoides* (uh-RAY-nee-uhs gem-oye-dees). Commonly called



the **Cat Faced Spider**. They're called this because if you look at their abdomen from the

front they often have **two black dots** that look like the cats eyes, a **white marking** that looks like the cat's mouth and nose, and their **two bumps** looks like the cats ears.

Commonly called the **Banded Garden Spider**.

A common representative of the genus *Neoscona* in Utah is *Neoscona oaxacensis* (nee-oh-SKOH-nuh oh-ax-uh-sense-is). Commonly called the **Western Spotted Orb Weaver**. This is also the most commonly encountered spider at Antelope Island State Park.



Orb weaver spiders primarily **prey upon flying insects** that get trapped in their webs. Some common prey items include butterflies, moths, dragonflies, damselflies, midges, mosquitos, and flies. Some of the **larger orb weavers** have been observed eating small frogs, or hummingbirds that have gotten ensnared in their webs.

Orb weavers eat their prey after it has died by **repeatedly vomiting digestive fluids** over the prey's body, and **chewing** on it with their chelicera, until all but the inedible parts have been consumed.

A common representative of the genus *Argiope* in Utah is *Argiope trifasciata* (ahr-JY-oh-pee try-fass-key-AH-tuh).



Sources:

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Stephanie M Cobbold "The Common Spiders of Antelope Island State Park"

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