

Black Throated Blue Warbler with spider and caterpillar for nestlings. Photo courtesy of Doug Tallamy.



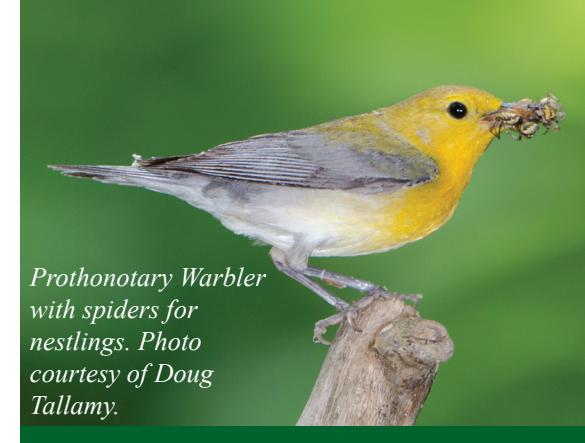
Ovenbird. This warbler nests on forest floors and depends on spiders for part of its food source. Photo courtesy of Jeff Kingery.

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Jumping Spiders

Why We Should Care About Spiders



Prothonotary Warbler with spiders for nestlings. Photo courtesy of Doug Tallamy.



Eastern Bluebird female with spider for nestlings.
Photo courtesy of Doug Tallamy.

Most of us are familiar with that wonderful spider, Charlotte, heroine of E.B. White's delightful tale, "Charlotte's Web." She was a clever and caring spider. She saved her friend, Wilbur the Pig's life, by writing positive messages about him in her web.

Although the children's story about Charlotte and Wilbur is, of course, fantasy, spiders are heroes in the ecosystems where they occur. They control disease-carrying pests like mosquitoes, flies, ticks and fleas by eating them. Left alone, they will consume many insects in and around your home.

Spiders also serve as food for other creatures, especially birds.

Chickadees, titmice, wrens, warblers, flycatchers, thrushes, catbirds, thrashers, the blackbird family (bobolinks, meadowlarks and orioles), tanagers, grosbeaks, buntings, sparrows, swallows and hummingbirds all include spiders in their insect diets. Some feed spiders to their nestlings. Many birds also eat spider eggs.

Based on the good work that Charlotte's relatives do, it's clear that we need to allow them to live. But it's hard for some to do that; arachnophobia is the most common universal human fear in spite of the fact less than ten people die of spider bites in the United States every year. (As many as 400 die falling from a ladder; between 20 and 50 die from dog bites.) It is that fear that causes many to hire companies to spray – both inside and outside their homes - to get rid of them. The fear of spiders is so great that some drivers have crashed their cars upon seeing one inside – at least one of them resulted in a fatality.



Spiders are not aggressive. They prefer avoiding humans; we are far more dangerous to them than they are to us. Spider bites are extremely rare. In the U. S., there are only two seriously venomous species: Black widow and brown recluse. But even their bites are uncommon and rarely cause serious issues.



Chickadee with egg case (eggs). Photo courtesy of Doug Tallamy.

We're not trying to convince anyone to revere spiders as the ancient Chinese (who called them "happy insects."), but we do hope that if you can't stand that spider in your home, don't kill it. Instead, capture it and move it out of doors where it can continue its good work controlling insects. If you are concerned about Lyme disease, forget looking for an opossum; the spiders in your yard will eat many more ticks than a single opossum which occasionally wanders by.

It's okay to have spiders in your home. Actually, even if you don't see them, these wonderful little creatures are there, catching and eating insects that are potentially much more dangerous to humans than spiders.