

Giant Golden Orb-weaving Spider in human diet at Kamrup District, Assam

Consumption of the Giant Golden Orb-weaving Spider by the Rabha tribal was recorded at Kamrup, Assam during September 2017. Nephila pilipes (Fabricius) (Araneae: Nephilidae) is a common species of spider found in India. The female N. pilipes is eye-catching due to its size (total length 37.5mm) and its huge web (more than a meter in diameter). The species is common in northeastern India and I had seen it opportunistically in northern West Bengal, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, and Meghalaya. Literature survey shows the species is well spread over southern and southeastern Asia, as well as in Australia, Japan, the Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu (Harvey et al. 2007). In Assam, the young female spider with a web appears in July. These large web weavers can be sighted from August to mid January.



Giant golden orb-weaving spider female Nephila pilipes. ©Sachin Ranade.



Prepared spiders for cooking. ©Sachin Ranade.





Shallow fry in mustard oil. ©Sachin Ranade.



Consumption of the cooked spiders. ©Sachin Ranade.

I came across a Rabha tribesman collecting the Giant Golden Orb-weavers at Rani in Kamrup (26.000N, 91.548E). The large females were hand-picked from their web and collected in a carry bag. On investigation, it was found that the spiders were taken for local consumption.

The Rabha tribal community was interviewed about this practice which revealed that the species is collected for local consumption. The members of the older generation were engaged in the collection of the spiders (250-500 g) from the wilderness around. This consumption was also practiced by other tribes in the areas such as Khasi and Bhoi in Meghalaya. The spiders after removal of the legs are shallow fried in mustard oil and consumed along with local rice beer. It is treated as a delicacy and extra source of protein. Entomophagy in northeastern India is well documented, yet documentation of use of spiders as alternate protein source are few (Meyer-Rochow 2005; Chakravorty et al. 2011; Dey 2013; Pongener et al. 2019). Two species from the genus Nephila have been recorded as food item from Madagascar and northeastern India. There are a few studies on the nutritional values of these invertebrate fauna (Jongema 2015).



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