

## LOWER SILVERMINE RIVER ESTUARY - GOLDEN ORB SPIDERS (NEPHILIDAE)

The name for these spiders is inappropriate as the only genus in the family to spin a golden web is the Nephila, or Black-Legged Nephila. We have only recently found a few species of these in the Wetlands, although they are a Western Cape species commonly found in Kirstenbosch and Newlands Forest. They construct a large vertical, sulphurous yellow web which has the top section missing. These webs are usually supported between two trees and can even span highways with the orb up to a metre wide and about 1.5 m from the ground. They are so strong they can capture small birds, although there is no evidence that these birds are eaten. The males are one thousandth of a female's weight and usually mate while the female is busy eating, to avoid being eaten himself. The female will lay between 400-1500 eggs and constructs her egg sac on a leaf or tree bark. *Norman Larsen Assoc. Arachnologist Iziko SA Natural History Museum, Cape Town.*



Black-Legged Nephila



Black-legged Nephila web



Common Banded Argiope



As a point of interest, Simon Peers and Nicholas Godley took the Nephila literally and engaged 80 Madagascans to harvest silk from an estimated million female golden Orb Web spiders for 7 years. They produced an exquisite golden cape, the largest garment ever made of spider silk.

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/today/hi/today/newsid\\_9674000/9674949.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/today/hi/today/newsid_9674000/9674949.stm)

It will go on display at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

See if you can find some of these spiders – we have 5 in the Wetlands!