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Spiders worked together to weave massive web

By Anna M. Tinsley
Fort Worth Star-Telegram

FORT WORTH, Texas — Spiders worked together to make the massive web in Lake Tawakoni State Park, researchers say.

Three times the spiders built it. Three times wind and rain ravaged it.

Tuesday afternoon, thousands of spiders were back at it again, working to rebuild the massive web that at one time stretched about 200 yards, covering bushes and trees to create a creepy canopy.

Researchers say they think thousands of spiders from different species worked together to make one large, all-encompassing web, unusual from the traditional individual webs that normally would be woven. Together, the spiders have built and rebuilt a web that has caught potentially tens of thousands of flies and bugs and the attention of people nationwide.

"These spiders seem to be working together to build it back," said Zach Lewis, an office clerk at the Lake Tawakoni park.

"It's really something to see. They're crawling on trees, on the ground, everywhere. We're here praying for rain all the time, but with something like this, you kinda want the rain to stop."

Ever since the web was noticed this summer at the state park about 50 miles east of Dallas, tourists and park workers have been amazed by its magnitude.

Researchers say it likely took 1 ½ to two months to weave such a large web.

Researchers took samples of the spiders in late August, and Allen Dean, an entomologist at Texas A&M University in College Station, helped identify them.

He found 12 spider families, with the most prevalent being from the Tetragnathidae family.

Among what was identified: funnel web weavers, sac spiders, orb weavers, mesh web weavers, wolf spiders, pirate spiders, jumping spiders and low-jawed orb weavers, according to the researchers' report.

For weeks, many have speculated about how such a big web could have been created and whether spiders worked together to build it.

The motive may well be food, researchers say. The larger the web, the more flies and bugs get stuck, providing an abundant food supply for the spiders.

"Spiders generally are cannibalistic and keep their webs distinct," Dean said. "We're not sure what started the

initial webbing ... but there probably have been thousands of spiders working on the web.

"With the amount of rain that has occurred this year and the huge food supply available, it just created the right condition for all of this."

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