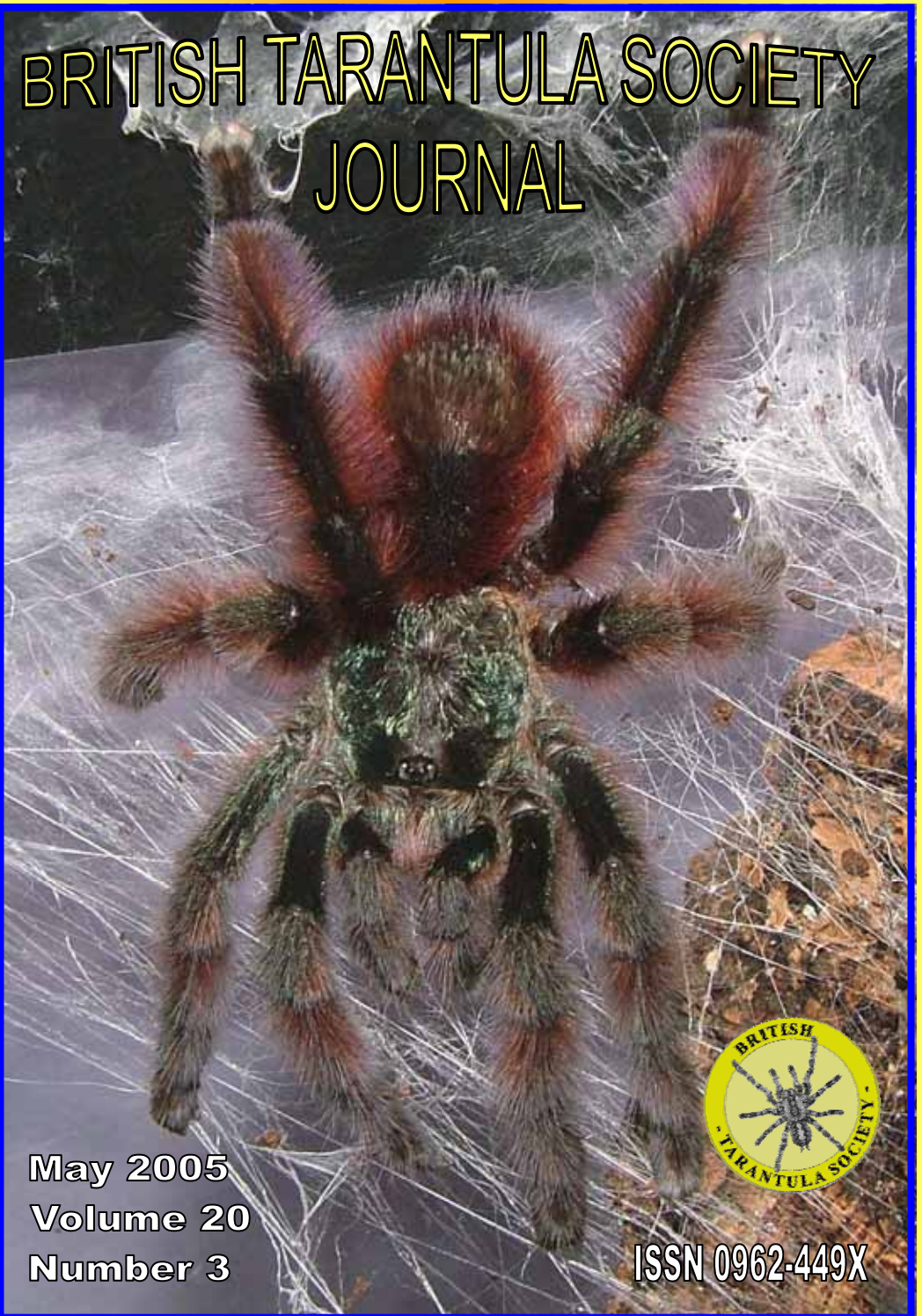


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Contents list

Portman, C.	Back to the Future	70–71
Walters, M.	Breeding <i>Lasiodora parahybana</i>	72–73
Sainsbury, C. & B.	Breeding Notes on <i>Avicularia bicegoi</i>	73–77
Bagaturov, M. F.	Some Notes on Breeding <i>Avicularia versicolor</i> with Comments on the Hobby in Russia	78–88
Ross, L. K. & West, R. C.	A Listing of Male Theraphosids Which Lack Tibial Apophyses	81
Gabriel, R.	Some Observations on Egg Laying and Egg-sac Construction by <i>Poecilotheria regalis</i>	82–88
Perry, L.	Snail-eating Behaviour in Funnelweb Spiders: Drought Survival Strategy or Just Opportunistic Feeding?	89–91

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Some Notes on Breeding *Avicularia versicolor* with Comments on the Hobby in Russia

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I have been keeping tarantulas about 14 years and consider myself one of the most experienced keepers here in Russia.

The history of tarantula-keeping in Russia is not that old – maybe only 15 years.

In the early days single specimens were brought to Russia by various seamen. These specimens comprised *Brachypelma albopilosum*, an unidentified *Brachypelma* sp. (these two subsequently hybridised) and a species from Cuba – *Citharacanthus spinicrus* (now extinct in the hobby here). At the end of 1990, contact with European dealers and hobbyists was established and additional species entered Russia in small numbers: *Lasiadora parahybana* and *Psalmopoeus cambridgei*, first, followed by some *Brachypelma* spp. and wild-caught *Grammostola rosea*.

Within the last five years some species have been imported in sufficient numbers to allow captive breeding. Several keepers, mostly in Moscow, have cooperated in these tarantula breeding projects. During this period Russian keepers successfully bred the following species (*bred myself): *Psalmopoeus cambridgei**, *Avicularia* sp. Peru “*huriana*” (accidentally), *A. versicolor**, *Lasiadora parahybana*, *Brachypelma albopilosum**, *Haplopelma lividum**, *H. schmidti*, *Stromatopelma calceatum*, *Acanthoscurria* sp. *musculosa*, *A. brocklehursti**, *Brachypelma vagans*, *Nhandu coloratovillosus** and *Grammostola rosea* (accidentally)*. In this article I will try to share my experiences of captive breeding.



Plate 1: *Avicularia versicolor* mature male - photo by A. Labunsky.



Plate 2: *Avicularia versicolor* female with egg-sac - photo by A. Labunsky.

My breeding experience started with *Psalmopoeus cambridgei*, which I have bred several times over the last 4–5 years, from my 6-year-old female. In one case the male was eaten after insertion, the other times the male escape without any damage – with my assistance. I consider females of this species to be very aggressive towards males, based on my own experiences and observations from other Russian keepers (Evgeny Yu. Rogov, pers. comm.).

Unfortunately I did not keep records for my first breeding projects, but have now started to gather them for my more recent breeding attempts.

Breeding *Avicularia versicolor*

Avicularia versicolor (**Plate 1**) is one of the most incredible and colourful arboreal tarantulas, and the one I most wanted to breed, ever since I purchased my 2.5-year-old female as a spiderling.

In mid June I received a male from my friend Mikhail Afanasiev (Moscow). They were mated on 14th June 2004, but neither displayed any drumming behaviour or aggression.

The egg-sac was constructed in the evening of the 13th July 2004. I was scheduled to go on a two-week holiday to Southern Russia the following day, so I watered the cage, filled the water bowl and departed in the hope that when I returned all would be well. My previous year's sac from the species was infertile.

On my return I found the female cradling the sac in its silken retreat, just as I had left it (**Plate 2**). Thereafter I fed the female with crickets and roaches, but never actually saw her eating, myself.

I decide to remove the sac at 4 weeks for artificial incubation (not my usual 3 weeks for arboreals). After that period I removed the sac from the female, finding that the contents had developed into nymph-2 (**Plate 3**). Only three dead, wizened, black eggs were found. This egg-sac removal was undertaken on the 7th August 2004 – my birthday; a really nice coincidence!

Following a photo-shoot I placed all 86 nymphs in a plastic container lined with 3–4 layers of slightly moistened kitchen paper. I also covered the nymphs with some crumpled paper and re-attached the ventilated lid. This incubator was placed alongside my juvenile tarantula containers, at a temperature of about 25°C (this is my flat's room temperature and I do not use secondary heating for my spiders).

Within 1.5 weeks the nymphs started to darken indicating to me that they were



Plate 3: *Avicularia versicolor* egg-sac opened on 27th day with nymph-2s
- photo by A. Labunsky.

about to moult into spiderlings. During the night of the 28th August 2004, before I went to sleep, I discovered one nymph in the process of moulting and one that had just done so. Over the next two days all the nymphs had become spiderlings. This is the first successful breeding of this beautiful arboreal species in Russia. I hope to try breeding *Haplopelma lividum* next; I'm just waiting for the male to produce a sperm-web.

You can find additional material on my tarantula breeding experiences, as well as plenty of scientifically orientated information on them, on my website: <http://tarantulas.tropica.ru>

Many thanks to Phil Messenger for encouraging me to write this article and to Richard Gallon for editing it and making it readable.