

Striped ‘climate refugee’ spider found in Cheshire for the first time

- **Wasp spider recorded in Cheshire for the first time during an ecological survey of Chester Zoo’s estate**
- **Big, brightly coloured newcomer dubbed “Wendy the wasp spider” by zoo conservationists**
- **Experts say climate change is driving the species north**
- **The team that made discovery “thrilled” at find, but warn environmental change is impacting UK wildlife**



The first recording of a wasp spider’s presence in Cheshire was made on the Chester Zoo estate

A wasp spider has been recorded in Cheshire for the first time – and conservationists say her discovery highlights the need to make

space for nature.

The large yellow-and-black spider was spotted during a biodiversity survey of Chester Zoo's estate and has been confirmed as the first recorded sighting of the species in Cheshire.

The discovery was made by Chester Zoo conservationists working with RECORD, Cheshire's local environmental records centre, and was subsequently confirmed by an expert from the British Arachnological Society.

Rosie Cooper, estate biodiversity assistant, made the discovery.

She said: "When go out into the field, it involves a lot of walking, using a mixture of apps, wildlife identifying books and our own knowledge to learn more specifics about the habitats we look after.

"I was looking out for plant species and then I saw this big, stripy, brightly coloured spider. I have what you might call a healthy respect for spiders, so my first thought was 'woah!' But now I think it's really cool to have found her."

The spider, nicknamed 'Wendy' by the zoo team, is among a number of species whose ranges are moving northwards as they respond to a changing climate.

Ruby Merriman, Chester Zoo's Estate Biodiversity Manager, said:

"We were really thrilled to find Wendy. She's a beautiful and fascinating species, and recording a wasp spider in Cheshire for the first time is really exciting.

"Wasp spiders are slowly moving north as their southern ranges in Europe warm too quickly for them to adapt. Some conservation organisations refer to animals driven to migrate by climate change as 'climate refugees' – which is a good term. They are moving because of human activity, and we need to make space for them."

The zoo's wider estate, which spans 205 hectares, includes wet meadows, ponds, reedbeds, species-rich grasslands, woodlands, orchards and hedgerows, supporting a wide range of wildlife.

The zoo estate supports a range of key UK species, including harvest mice, which are listed on the IUCN Red List as Near Threatened, great crested newts and badgers. It is also a nesting site for barn owls and hosts dozens of dragonfly, moth and butterfly species.

Scott Wilson, head of field programmes at Chester Zoo, said:

"It's exciting to see new species like Wendy on site, but her arrival is part of a broader, more worrying trend. Our conservationists work across the world, and we are witnessing the impacts of climate change in real time, from droughts in Chile to floods in Indonesia. It is a major threat to biodiversity.

"When mountain snows thaw unseasonably, montane forests dry out and small islands face rising sea levels, the species that depend on them must disperse or die. There is a causal link between habitat loss and climate change, and both are already driving species to extinction.

"European spiders are among many species finding it harder to persist in their traditional ranges as the climate shifts. Wendy is a reminder UK biodiversity is not immune to this."

About Chester Zoo

www.chesterzoo.org

- Chester Zoo is a world-leading conservation and education charity that's committed to preventing extinction and dedicated to raising awareness of key conservation and environmental challenges.
- The zoo's 130-acre site in Chester, which is home to more 500 threatened species, is where this species-saving work is made possible.
- As a not-for-profit, the zoo ploughs everything into its conservation mission, both here in the UK and around the world.
- It works with more than 3,000 species globally, including 140 international animal conservation breeding programmes, which are ensuring the survival of species on the very brink of extinction. It's also home to five national plant collections, comprising of more than 1,000 species.
- Experts from the zoo are recognised by governments and NGOs across the world as leaders within the global conservation community. Currently, the zoo is saving species on behalf of the Bermudan, Spanish and Portuguese governments, among others.
- The zoo works with over 100 partners in more than 20 countries to recover threatened wildlife and restore habitats, including orangutans in Bornean rainforests, elephants and tigers in Indian grasslands, lemurs and frogs in Malagasy forests, rare fish in Mexican lakes and a host of species here in the UK.
- The zoo influences policy both in the UK and internationally, engaging with governments worldwide to take action to halt the biodiversity crisis.
- Its millions of annual visitors and huge online communities are part of the educational, scientific and conservation jigsaw, empowering them to be part of solutions for wildlife, creating a future where nature can survive and thrive.
- Chester Zoo lives and breathes conservation – from its animal and plant care, to its scientific breakthroughs, to its policy work and its vital role in inspiring and educating people about the natural world and the impact humans have on it – creating and nurturing the conservationist in us all.