

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

ARACHNIDS

13.1 The arachnid fauna of south central Seram

As with insects, only a very few specimens compared with the total number of known species were collected in the field. Nevertheless, they do cover most species commonly encountered and named by the Nuaulu. A checklist of arachnid specimens recorded in the Nuaulu area during field-work is presented in table 22.

13.2 Nuaulu categories applied to arachnids excepting Acarida

13.2.1 kanopone

Scorpions (SCORPIONIDA) and possibly also whip-scorpions (URO-PYGI).

13.2.2 riko-riko, nau asue

The first term is consistently applied to harvestmen (PHALANGIDA). In the second, **nau** is a general term for augury and divination; **asu** = 'dog', **asu-** = 'cheek' + non-human possessive pronominal suffix. **Nau asue** is applied to the harvestman *Altobunus formosus*. It is probably a synonym for **riko-riko**, being used as a nick-name in circumstances in which it seems auspicious.

13.2.3 kahuneke hatu nohu inae

Hatu nohu(e), meaning 'cavernous rock outcrop, cave', indicates the habitat of this spider; **inae** = 'mother'. As **kahunekete** is the generic term for spider we thus have 'mother cave spider'. Applied quite specifically to tailless whip scorpions, and generally encountered in rock fissures when hunting bats.

13.2.4 kahuneke ai ukune

Ai ukune = 'treetop', far forest. Applied to various kinds of long-bodied spider, including *Theridion* and possibly *Nephilia*. It therefore seems to be applied to both hunters and spinners of irregular webs in forest habitats.

13.2.5 kahuneke titie

Titie = 'hot', so-called on account of the ability of this round-bodied spider to bite humans and cause a painful swelling. Applied to *Argiope*, and perhaps *Heteropoda*; also applied to the local variety of the Black Widow, *Latrodectus*, and members of the families *Clenidae*, *Clubionidae* and *Theraphosidae*. Commonly found around human habitations and in cleared areas.

13.2.6 kahuneke metene

Metene = 'black'. Almost always applied to long-bodied spiders, such as *Nephilia*.

13.2.7 kahuneke masikune

Masikune = 'yellow'. Not applied to any specimen with certainty, but sometimes used to describe *Argiope* with yellow markings.

13.2.8 kahuneke nikate

Nikate = 'pattern, drawing, design': refers to orb-web or markings of *Argiope*, and perhaps other spiders (e.g. *Salticidae*).

13.2.9 kahuneke numa

Numa = 'house'. Applied to the most common domestic jumping spider (*Heteropoda venatoria*), found living on the inner and outer walls of houses and other structures. This spider has a benign reputation among the Nuauulu for its depredations on cockroaches and other undesirable insects. *Agelenidae* may be present, but probably also includes members of the following families: *Heteropodidae*, *Psechridae*, *Pholcidae* and *Argiopidae*.

13.2.10 kahuneke onate

Onate = 'large'. I have only come across this term being applied to long-bodied spiders described by other informants as **kahuneke wala-wala**, though R.B. reports that the term also appears to be used interchangeably with **kahuneke masikune**, indicating the inclusion of *Argiope*.

13.2.11 (kahuneke) wala-wala

Wala-wala = 'web'. Applied to long-bodied spiders including *Nephilia*; to all web-spinners. In fact, web-spinning spiders are sometimes simply called **wala-wala** (the product coinciding terminologically with the producer). For a long time this usage was a source of perplexity to me.

TABLE 22 Checklist of Arachnid specimens recorded in the Nuaulu region of south central Seram, 1970-1975.

Species	Ecological zones			Nuaulu gloss
	1	2	3	
SCORPIONIDA -scorpions				
<i>Isometrus maculatus</i>	+	+	+	kanopone
UROPYGIDA				
UROPYGI -whip scorpions				
<i>Uropygi</i> sp.				
AMBYPYGI -tailess whip scorpions				
Charontidae	-	-	+	kahuneke hatu nohu inae
ACARIDA -mites and ticks				
<i>Aponomma gervaisi</i>				
<i>Seiulus amboinensis</i>				[chapter 10.2.7, 10.4]
PHALANGIDA -harvestmen				
<i>Altobunus formosus</i>	+	+	+	riko-riko, nau asue
ARANEIDA -spiders (hunters)				
Sparassidae				
<i>Nephilia</i> sp.	-	+	+	kahuneke wala-wala, kahuneke wala-wala sonu, kahuneke metene, kahuneke onate, kahuneke ai ukune
<i>Nephilia maculata</i>				
<i>Heteropoda venatoria</i>	+	-	-	kahuneke numa, kahuneke titie
(web-spinners)				
Theridiidae -irregular webs				
<i>Theridion</i> sp.	+	+	+	kahuneke ai ukune
<i>Latrodectus hasselti</i>	+	+	-	kahuneke titie
- 'black widow'				
Argiopidae -orb webs				
<i>Argiope</i> sp.	+	+	+	
<i>Argiope aemula</i>	+	+	+	kahuneke titie kahuneke nikate, kahuneke masikune

Key. Zone 1 = village; zone 2 = cultivated areas; zone 3 = forest.

13.2.12 kahuneke wala-wala sonu

Sonu refers to **ikae sonu**, needlefish of the genera *Strongylura* and *Tylosurus*. The web of this round-bodied spider is collected, twisted together and used as bait (or more correctly as a substitute for a hook) when line-fishing for needlefish, who find it difficult to extricate their teeth from the compressed webby substances (chapter 9.2.12). Only two individuals in Rohua (Naunepe and Komisi) claim to use this technique, and it has almost certainly been acquired from outsiders.

13.3 Variation, arrangement of categories and the social significance of arachnids

All ARANEIDA, together with cave scorpion spiders (ABLYPYGI), are classified as **kahunekete**. This is terminologically expressed in every name collected except **wala-wala**, where the prefix **kahuneke** is optionally dropped. It is clear that the various terms for types of spider and the content of the categories which they label do not easily yield a taxonomic representation. The phylogenetic content of particular categories may be wide-ranging and overlapping, reflecting a series of asymmetric cross-cutting contrasts between marked categories and their residues: *large : (other)*, *house-dwelling : (other)*, *black : (other)*, *stinging : (other)*.

Harvestmen (PHALANGIDA) are regarded by many Nuauulu as related (on morphological grounds) to spiders, and some people actually suggested that they might be a kind of **kahunekete**. Scorpions are regarded as unaffiliated. Aquatic arachnids (MEROSTOMATA) are peripherally linked (in a residual way) with other kinds of marine invertebrates and are therefore considered in chapter 14. As can be seen from an inspection of table 13.1, the combination of functional and morphological characteristics used to generate particular names (body shape, colour, web type, sting, habitat) result in a rather uneasy fit between phylogenetic and Nuauulu classification, and with the exception of **kahuneke hatu nohu inae** are probably applied rather loosely.

The term **kahunekete** resembles **kau** (the contracted form of **kauke**, as also applied to crickets, grasshoppers and locusts) plus the root **neke** (= 'sleep'). It may not be too fanciful to read into this the representation of a classificatory linkage. The general similarities between arachnids and insects are fairly obvious: they are small, invertebrate, have hard exoskeletons, have six or eight legs and scamper; **neke** would appear to relate to web-spinning and the habit of sitting motionless for long periods at a stretch. If this is so, then a characteristic of prominent members of a category have been appropriated to label the category as a whole. This is a practice which

we are most familiar with in respect to birds, though it is an inevitable consequence of any classification which relies on salient distinctive features.

The only mundane technical practice connected with arachnids is the use of the web of **kahuneke wala-wala sonu** for catching needlefish. As a group, arachnids are not feared. Some are known to be harmful to humans (**kahuneke titie, kanopone**); but others may be auspicious (**nau asue**). The only general belief concerning spiders which I have come across, and this is associated with web-spinners, is that they 'lie to dogs'. On one occasion in 1975 I was returning to Rohua with Kaiisa when his dogs began whinnying and snapping and walking around in circles. I asked why this should be and was told that webs stretching across the path had led the dogs to lose their way, and that they would now find an alternative route home. The belief is that this is wilful interference on the part of spiders, but nevertheless playful and non-malevolent.