

Sunday, April 15, 2007

Checking on Ara

Slide Show # 3

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Today is the 15th of April. The cherry blossoms are long gone. The cherry leaves have unfolded. The spider ARA still lives in her Plexiglas dome. To cheer her up (if one can actually bring joy to a spider?), I have placed a small Kalanchoe plant next to Ara's dome. Why not let the little spider crawl on the beautiful flowers?



Using a wooden Chinese chopstick, I transferred Ara onto the potted plant. While happily stalking along from one blossom to another, she pulled along a thin spider thread.



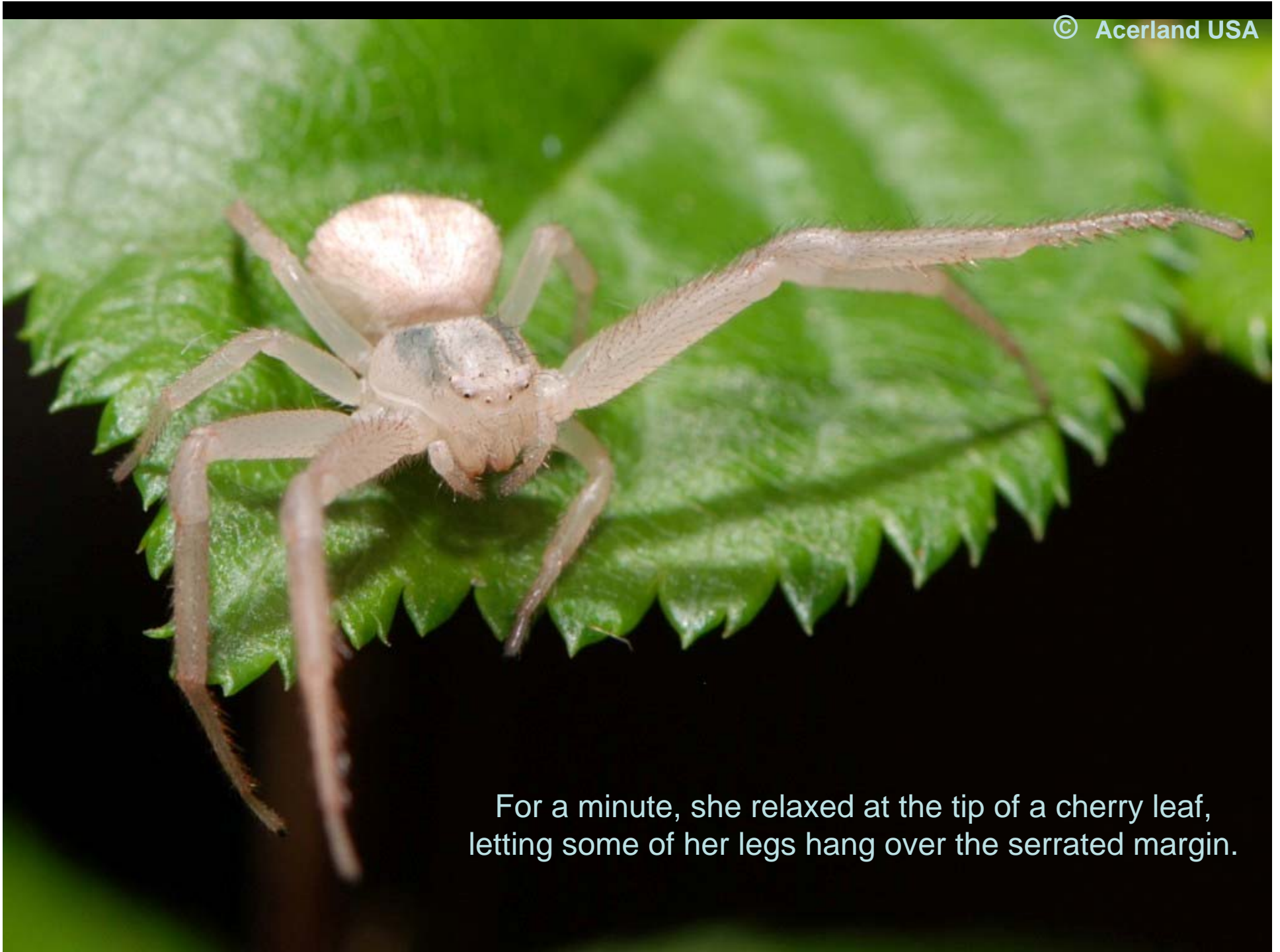
It may be my imagination, but it appeared to me that Ara felt quite at home among the tiny red flowers.



Quite at home!



After a few minutes I put my little spider back into her dome.
But Ara is restless and runs from leaf to leaf, exploring and inspecting every one.



For a minute, she relaxed at the tip of a cherry leaf, letting some of her legs hang over the serrated margin.



Then she is on her way again. Here, she stretches a long, hairy leg toward a neighboring leaf.

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She has climbed
to the next leaf.
She pauses.

Who dared to take
a bite out of this leaf?

A juicy insect, maybe?
Perhaps, there is
another meal around.

Food!



I imagine what sort of monster she would be if she were 1000 times as big. I calculate and conclude that the array of her eyes would be 2 meters (6 feet) wide. If I were to lie across on top of her head, my whole body would just fit between the right and left sides of her eyes. Frightening! If this would be so, I would be Ara's next meal. I shudder.



Fortunately, I am big and she is small. And she just sits in the Plexiglas dome.
Enough for today!

Lamentation! Where is Ara?

Today is the 18th of April. It has been exactly one month since I first discovered the tiny spider on a cherry twig. And three weeks have gone by since Ara had her first meal, a fly. It's time to give our spider her second meal. But no insects are in sight. The outside temperature is near freezing.

I removed the protective Plexiglass dome and looked for the spider. Where is she? Where is she?

And then, oh horror . . .

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Horror!
There, hidden under a cherry leaf,
hangs the lifeless body of Ara.

Horror and Grief!

I took my powerful magnifying glass and looked closer at the corpse.

Indeed, there she hangs, poor Ara!
I can see it all; the hairy legs,
the jaws, and even the broken eyes.





I took another look from above

Again, I used my magnifying glass.

“What a sad ending of such a beautiful spider,” I said to my wife Wanda. “Ara should have lived. She was well protected. And there was plenty of water and moisture.”

Wanda inspected the corpse with obvious sorrow. Then she had the explanation. “It was the other brown spider! It sucked Ara out!”



Well, yes!



Yesterday, I saw this little brown spider as it sat on a package of sweetener near the warm coffee pot. It's a small spider. The package measures 1.5 x 2.5 inches (35 x 64 mm); so the body of the spider is only 7 mm long. I caught the little creature and put it in the dome. And assuming he was a male, I called him Oro.

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Needless to say, Oro is not very attractive, particularly if one inspects him with a powerful magnifying glass. Fierce eyes, threatening jaws, and muscular legs! And he is fast! But, he is also very shy and tries to hide. And he is really not bigger than Ara once was.

What a tragedy that he sucked poor Ara out!



And in the sinking evening sun . . .



He casts most frightful shadows!

And then the miracle happened. Out of the corner of my eye, I glimpsed a movement.

A delicate green spider slid down a silken thread. It was Ara! Alive!

Now it all became clear. Ara grew so much that she had to shed her old skin. And an even more beautiful and bigger spider had emerged.

Ara is alive!

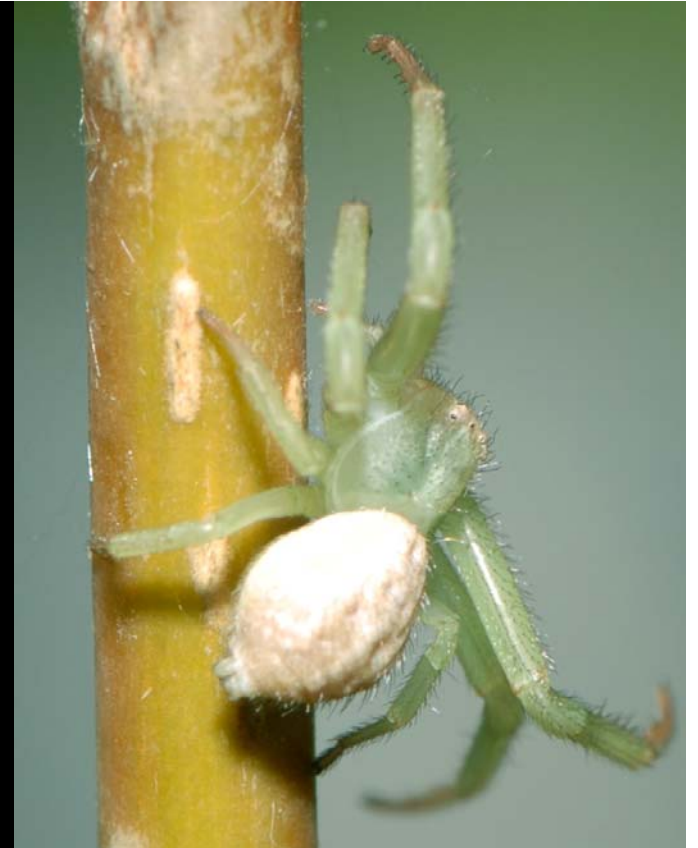


THE NEW ARA



THE OLD SKIN

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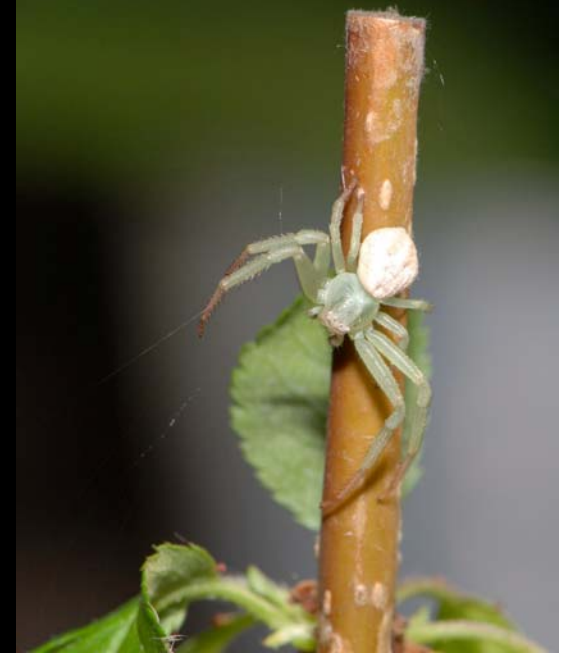
The head, the thorax and the legs are now green, fit to be camouflaged on green leaves.



Now, we recognize her as a typical thomisid crab spider, also known as a flower spider.

The family of the *thomisidae* are ambush predators!

And here she is, the new and more beautiful Ara



And this ambush
PREDATOR
is very hungry!

And so ends
the third installment of
the life and adventures
of the spider *Ara*

Ebo K. Sauerland

April 18, 2007

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