



The Northern Rail Trail was a busy place on August 24 as veterans from the New England Summer Sports Clinic for Veterans and a support team from the New England Handicapped Sports Association kicked off two days of adaptive sports activities on the Rail Trail and in other Lake Sunapee area locations. Photo: Charlie Darling

Disabled Veterans Ride The Rail Trail

By Lindy Heim

Friends of the Northern Rail Trail

The New England Summer Sports Clinic for Veterans, sponsored by the Boston Veterans Administration (VA) Healthcare System and New England Handicapped Sports Association in Sunapee, is a wonderful five-day event for disabled veterans.

On July 24 and 25, on the Northern Rail Trail at Potter Place, teams of athletes from all over New England gathered to enjoy the out-of-doors. "Veterans involved in adaptive sports activities benefit from positive connections with the community and from nature," says Ralph Marche, Chief of Voluntary and Recreation Therapy Service at the Boston VA.

The organizers again chose the Northern Rail Trail because of its beauty, bike-friendly surface, wide expanse, and one percent maximum grade.

Four teams of participants set out on the Rail Trail beginning at the Potter Place trailhead. These groups of 15 to 20 veterans and their staff operate cycles, some of which are specially designed to feature a drive train powered by the arms rather than the legs. Athletes rode up and back on a two-mile stretch going north from Potter Place to Eagle Pond. The Friends of the Northern Rail Trail (FNRT) are delighted that disabled citizens are making use of the rail trail for easy access to the outdoors.

For more information, visit FNRT.org.



Andover Naturally

The Garden Spider

By Alex Southworth
For the Beacon

Mid-August is when I start my lookout for *Argiope aurantia*, (ar-GUY-oh-pee our-RAN-chee-uh), otherwise known as the common garden spider. A climbing rose in my vegetable garden has been home to three consecutive generations of this beautiful and elegant spider, and I have sat for hours on an overturned milk crate watching her.

Maybe you have noticed her distinctive web, spun in the orb shape with a thick band of zig-zag silk through the center. Some people call this the "writing" spider because of the "z" shaped lines, though really these are stabilizing lines (called stabilimenta) for reinforcing the web.

By mid-August, most of these spiders will have matured to their full, startling size of over an inch! You'll most likely notice the female, as the males, though similar in color markings, are almost three times smaller.

Toward the end of August, males can often be found lurking around the edges of the female's web, waiting for their chance to mate. Take the time to sit and watch *Argiope*. She hangs head down in the center of her web, often with her legs placed in pairs, looking as if she had only four, and not the eight legs required for an arachnid.

Because she is carnivorous, she waits for a beetle, a wasp, a grasshopper – anything edible – to become trapped in her sticky web. She then darts forward, wraps her prey in silk, and injects

venom to liquify the insides of whatever she has captured. She might save it for later or drink her meal immediately.

There is no need to worry about being bitten, as her venom is not harmful to humans. If you very gently touch her abdomen with a piece of straw, you might witness her athletic prowess as she will vibrate her web alarmingly, looking as if she were doing speed pushups. If this tactic doesn't alarm an intruder, *Argiope* will drop from her web and hide. I have seen web vibrations last for three minutes!

After a full day, *Argiope* will actually consume her entire web, only to rebuild it completely by morning. When ready, she will accept advances from a male. Sadly for him, he will die during copulation and will be wrapped for a later meal.

When she's ready to lay her eggs, *Argiope* makes a brown, papery sac the size of a grape, deposits 300 to 1,400 eggs (who counts these?), and seals the sac with silk, carefully securing it into her web. Even with such careful placement, the egg sac can become a home for parasites; one egg sac was revealed to host 19 separate species of insects and spiders.

The mother will watch over her eggs until she dies, here in New Hampshire usually with the first hard frost. The spiderlings hatch in the fall but live within their sac (often surviving by eating each other) until the following spring, when they emerge from the sac and the life cycle begins anew.



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