

The British Arachnological Society wishes to express extreme concern over the potential impact of plans for a theme park on the Swanscombe peninsula on the site's important spider fauna. Although the Swanscombe peninsula habitat is largely post-industrial brownfield, the varied conditions that have developed there, together with the adjacent salt marsh, provide refuges for at least 23% of Britain's spider fauna. Approximately a quarter of Britain's 670 spider species are currently Red Listed either as being under threat of extinction, or Near Threatened within the UK. Several of these occur on the proposed development site and include species for which their natural habitats in Britain have already been very substantially destroyed by human activity.

Foremost among the spider species of conservation concern on the Swanscombe site is the Distinguished Jumping Spider *Attulus distinguendus*. This is a Section 41 Priority species and is classified as Critically Endangered on the British Red List because of its extremely high extinction risk. Its only other known British site, on the opposite side of the Thames estuary, is unprotected and has already been fragmented and reduced in area by a lorry park development; part of the remainder of the site is highly threatened by development and the rest is severely degraded by illegal recreational activity. The Distinguished Jumping Spider is a heat-loving species, normally found in mature dune systems but the ash, sand and clinker areas at Swanscombe very effectively replicate the conditions it needs. Mature dune systems are an increasingly rare habitat in Britain and continue to be threatened by tourism and development pressures.

Two other Section 41 species inhabit the site's saltmarsh fringe habitats: Duffey's Bell-head Spider *Praestigia duffeyi*, which is classified as Endangered on the British Red List, and the Yellow-striped Bear Spider *Arctosa fulvolineata* which is Red Listed as Near Threatened. A further 14 of the site's spider species are considered Nationally Scarce, a status reflecting their very restricted distributions in Britain.