

British Nature Guide

Spiders are not insects (Part 2)



How do spiders grow?

Spiders are arachnids not insects.

Arachnids are invertebrates, this means that they do not have a skeleton on the inside of their body. Their skeleton is on the outside. This is called an exoskeleton.

Think of the exoskeleton as a suit of armour. If a child had a suit of armour it would be quite small. The armour would not grow like the child does, so sooner or later it would have to be replaced by a larger suit. It is the same for spiders.

When they get too big for their exoskeleton they have to pull their body out. Once it is free of the outer shell their soft body can grow until gradually their new exoskeleton hardens on the outside. During their lives spiders will do this many times.



Crabs are not arachnids, but they do shed their exoskeletons in the same way that spiders do. If you go to a beach look for an empty crab exoskeleton. They are much bigger than spiders and easier to find.