



BUTTERFLY PAVILION

Golden Orb-Weaver (*Trichonepila calvipes*)



Countries: United States, Mexico, Central and South America

Habitat: This is the only species of golden orb-weaver native to the Western Hemisphere. This orb-weaver can be found from North Carolina to Argentina in open woods or edges of dense forest.

Diet: The diet of giant golden orb-weavers includes small-to-medium-sized flying insects such as flies, beetles, and small moths or butterflies.

Predators: Insectivorous birds are the most common predators of the golden orb-weavers.

Behavior: These spiders will construct secondary webs surrounding their primary web to better detect and evade attack from predators. Unlike most orb-weaving spiders, giant golden orb-weavers do not deconstruct and reconstruct their web daily. Instead, they will repair their web as necessary. When males reach maturity, they inhabit the webs of females and guard her until she is ready to copulate following her final molt. Males must attract females with a mating dance to avoid being eaten.

Lifespan: These spiders live a maximum of one year, with spiderlings emerging in the spring and adults dying when winter arrives.

Growth and Development: Golden orb-weavers are the largest non-tarantula spider in North America. There is marked sexual dimorphism in giant golden orb-weavers. Females reach a length of 24 to 40mm with bright coloration consisting of a silvery carapace, yellow spotted body, and brown and orange banded legs with hair brushes. Males, on the other hand, are dark brown in color with an average length of 6mm. This large difference in length translates into females having a mass 30 to 70 times greater than males.

Endangered Status: This species is labeled as stable on IUCN.

Fun Fact: Giant golden orb-weavers construct one of the strongest webs of any spider. A single thread of anchor silk is eight times stronger than steel and current research is focused on potential medical and surgical uses of their silk.