

Flying spiders

Video transcript for flying spiders video presented by David Attenborough

This wonderful shimmering carpet of gossamer, strands of the finest silk, is the creation of a million baby spiders. It's autumn in England and time for spiderlings to leave their mothers.

The youngsters climb up the threads they've spun to reach the topmost twigs of the bushes. They tip their abdomens into the air and the gentle breeze catches the filaments as they issue from the spinnerets. Some filaments drift down and become entangled in the bushes. But when conditions are right the threads rise vertically upwards.

And away the spiderlings go.

On a calm day they may only travel a few metres, but if there's a breeze as there is now, they can be swept up high into the sky. Spiderlings have been recorded thousands of feet up and can travel for hundreds of miles.

So, silk can be used for transport, as well as looking after the young, courtship and of course catching prey. In an area of heath like this around me, it's been estimated that there's probably 14,000 miles of silk, enough to stretch from here in England to Australia. Ingenious though we are, we have not yet been able to invent anything as strong, as light or elastic, as silk.