

## **Devonian Fact File**

### **Early spider (*Palaeocharinoides*)**

This creature lacks the web-making abilities of modern spiders, but is certainly an ancestor to the spiders we see today. It was already very well adapted to a life as a land predator, where it probably sat in hiding and jumped out at small amphibians, insects and reptiles that went past.

### **A well-adapted land predator**

It is not known whether it injected a paralysing toxin into its prey as modern spiders often do, but the length of the fangs it has means that probably few animals struggled for long. The body had a head and a segmented abdomen with four pairs of legs. It is likely that both legs and body were slightly hairy to help *Palaeocharinoides* to feel the vibrations of any passing victim. It also had good eyesight, with a variety of eyes on the top, front and sides of its head to give all-round vision. Even their lungs were adapted for a life on land; they were very like the bellows a blacksmith uses on a fire to draw air over the coals, and have changed very little up to the present day. Lungs like this can be seen in their close relatives the harvestmen and horseshoe crabs even now.

Some smaller fossils of *Palaeocharinoides* have been found inside the hollow stems of plant. Were these smaller spiders waiting in ambush for their prey, or were they about to moult into a new, even larger, skin?