

Taking the Tasmanian Cave Spider to the world

NIALL DORAN PhD, Bookend Trust

You might think that studying the biology of the long-lived and reclusive Tasmanian Cave Spider would be enough of a challenge, but *filming* that research in sufficient quality for the big screen was a challenge all its own.

Over a quarter of a century ago, Niall was lucky to be told by one of Australia's leading arachnologists that if he wanted to study spiders he should look at the Tasmanian Cave Spider, because it was likely that the species would yield some fascinating information. This proved to be correct, and the information arising from those studies was lauded in scientific journals including the *Journal of Zoology* in London.

But such information stays in dry scientific papers, away from public eyes. Over a decade ago, had big documentary makers come calling, Niall would have happily handed that research over so someone else could tell the story more widely. Then a friend convinced him that it needed to be told by and from Tasmania, and that it needed to break the mould. So, began a wait for technology to reach a point that this was possible. And when it did, there would still be another seven years before the film would be completed.

This is an epic tale of challenge after challenge: of overcoming the physical and mental strain of filming in difficult environments with uncooperative animals and unforgiving caverns; of fighting against intentional copyright breaches of both footage and intellectual property; of resourcing and maintaining such an epic project from scratch, with enormous logistics from the field through to marketing and promotion; of open warfare with the national screen agency over how the film broke traditional stereotypes; and of finally completing the project for market on the barest of margins.

This story even involves one participant accidentally and unintentionally completing *Dry July*, much to his horror.

SIXTEEN LEGS has now received critical acclaim around the globe, has travelled from the deepest caves in Australia to the heights of global celebrity, and has spawned successful spin-offs in the form of books, education projects, an award-winning behind-the-scenes film and a travelling exhibition complete with two 18-foot wide courting spiders and a pulsating giant egg-sac.

To see more, go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yzER3jF05T4> or visit Bookend Trust at <https://www.bookendtrust.com/>