

THE BRITISH ISOPOD STUDY GROUP

Newsletter of the Isopod Survey Scheme

Number 23

December 1987

EDITORIAL

Since April of this year, more than 500 record cards have been submitted to the Isopoda Survey Scheme, a testament to both the upsurge in interest in the group and the sterling efforts of collectors. The known ranges of several species have been expanded quite dramatically (see below) and it is clear that many isopods are much more widespread than was thought, even a few years ago. This is probably due to increased vigilance by recorders, but we cannot discount the possibility that some species are expanding their ranges, particularly if they have been introduced in relatively recent times. A species worth looking for in this connection is Armadillidium depressum which, because of its large size and distinctive appearance, is unlikely to have been overlooked in the past. Where it does occur, A. depressum is often the most common species. It is easy to separate from the other Armadillidium species with reference to the key in Sutton's Woodlice (1980, Pergamon Press). In Reading we call it the 'Peeping pill slater' because when it rolls into a ball, it leaves a gap unlike its more common and widespread relatives A. vulgare which closes up tight, and A. nagatum which leaves its antennae poking out.

How do woodlice migrate from one place to another? One obvious method is to walk there. Studies in Israel have shown that the desert isopod Hemilepistus will walk for over 5 km on a rotating ball without stopping! Another method, albeit non-deliberate, is to be transported by man in rubble, farmyard manure etc. However, this summer, I managed to obtain categorical evidence that the humble welly boot is also an agent of woodlouse migration. The cottage where we stay while on holiday in the Lake District (in north-west England - for overseas readers) has an outhouse for the storage of muddy shoes. This is quite damp and contains a store of firewood which a population of Oniscus asellus has made its home. Porcellio spinicornis can also be found in crevices in the walls. On setting off for a day out, boots are thrown into the back of the car in expectation of a muddy walk at the other end (the usual situation in the Lake District). On one occasion, as I was unloading the footwear after a drive of about 30 km, I noticed a small creature drop off the sole of my wellies as I was putting them on. Closer inspection revealed that this was a gravid Oniscus asellus which liberated juveniles from its brood pouch all over my hand when I picked it up. Still attached to mud in the tread of my boots were three more Oniscus, and a single Porcellio spinicornis. The woodlice had unwittingly hitched a ride. This phenomenon had probably been taking place on most days as subsequent examination of the treads of my boots on the morning after returning from a muddy walk taken on the previous day invariably revealed the presence of a few woodlice. Does anyone else have any similar stories?

RECENT RECORDS

Armadillidium depressum

Mr D W Guntrip found a colony of this species at the base of a dry limestone wall near Buckden, Yorkshire on 24/5/87 (identification confirmed by Adrian

Rundle). This is a remarkable find and is about 200 km from the edge of its previous known range. There is considerable tourist activity in the area so it could be an isolated population brought there by some "flippin' southerners" (copyright Doug Richardson). In the same post as Mr Guntrip's record, a letter arrived from Dick Clements and Keith Alexander describing two further finds of this species.

On 2 July 1987, a number of A. depressum were found during a visit to the famous 'Italianate' village at Portmeirion (SH 590372, collector DC), Gwynedd, North Wales. Three individuals were present on the mortared wall of one particular building in the centre of the village. According to Sutton & Harding (1984, Wooldice in Britain and Ireland, 76-77) and Hopkin (1987, Isopoda, 1, 21-36) this would appear to be the most northerly record for this species to date, as well as being the first record for the region. A voucher specimen has been deposited with Joan Morgan at the University College Museum, Bangor.

A. depressum was also found on 9 June 1987, on masonry at the top of an airshaft leading to an abandoned World War II gun emplacement on the chalk cliffs at Round Down, near Dover (TR 291393, collector KA). This site considerably extends the eastern range of A. depressum, especially in the context of the recent records by A O Chater (1986, Isopoda Study Group Newsletter, 21, 6).

D K Clements & K N A Alexander, National Trust Biological Survey, Spitalgate Lane, Cirencester, Glos GL7 2DE.

Metatrichoniscoides celticus and Trichoniscoides albidus

M. celticus is no longer confined to South Wales as I found a single eyeless female of this species (confirmed by Graham Oliver) among damp old red sandstone rubble on St Bees Beach, Cumbria in August 1987. Also present were several specimens of T. albidus (male genitalia checked) which is the first record for the west coast of Britain. Trichoniscoides saeroeensis is also present at this site. I have collected from this exact site on five occasions in the last three years but have failed to find M. celticus or T. albidus before, although T. saeroeensis has been present on every occasion.

Haplophthalmus

Several recorders have been kind enough to send me their collections of Haplophthalmus species. I have checked them all and can confirm that the conclusions reached in Hopkin and Roberts (1987, Isopoda, 1, 37-48) are still valid. Haplophthalmus danicus is widespread and common in southern Britain. Haplophthalmus mengei (sensu stricto) is widespread north and west of Reading (I have found it on the bank of the Thames near Goring). However, all records for Haplophthalmus 'mengei' south and east of Reading (apart from a single record from the Kent coast made by Adrian Rundle) are of the new species which we are temporarily called Haplophthalmus NTB (New To Britain). Haplophthalmus NTB has also been found near Bath (David Bilton) and in Bedfordshire (Adrian Rundle). Specimens of H. 'mengei' collected from Sussex and Surrey by George Fussey and Arthur Chater have been checked and have been found to be Haplophthalmus NTB. It has not yet been possible to assign a name to the new species pending examination of French material which I hope to be able to do next summer.

SRB
NX91

WHEN IS A LOUSE NOT A LOUSE?

Every so often, Amy brings home pets from school. Sometimes snails, sometimes stick insects, and sometimes headlice. The latter usually spread their affection to my wife and myself but four year old Ben is apparently unfavoured, despite frequent searching. During the latest outbreak, he was clearly upset to be left out of the social grooming and decided to use the nit comb for himself. After the first pass he announced "That's not a headlice, that's a woodlice!", and so it was - Porcellio scaber firmly wedged between the comb's teeth. Thank goodness we no longer record on habitat cards!

Tony Irwin, Castle Museum, Norwich NR1 3JU

ISOPODA - VOLUME TWO

Volume 1 of Isopoda has met with an enthusiastic response and I would like to thank all the people who took the trouble to write, especially those who bought a copy! The print run of 100 is now almost sold out and will not be reprinted. If you have not yet got a copy and would like one, the cost is £3.50 inclusive of postage and packing.

Preparations for Volume 2 are well underway. Contributions have been received on woodlice in the cultural consciousness of Europe, brood pouch mortality, distribution of Trachelipus in the UK and USA and surveying of woodlice in urban areas. Several other authors are beavering away on their typewriters to meet the deadline of 31 January. Included in Volume 2 will be a section 'Miscellanea' which will include short notes of half a page or so. If you would like to include an article, please let me know as soon as possible, and no later than 31 January.

BISG/BMG MEETING, NEWBRIDGE ON WYE, 7-10 APRIL 1988

Everyone on the Isopod mailing list should have received details of our annual jaunt. More than 40 people returned the slip and should, by now, have received the second circular. If not, please let me know as soon as possible. It should be at least as enjoyable as last year's meeting. Noel Jackson might even write another ode (see elsewhere in this newsletter).

WHAT EATS WOODLICE? - INTERNATIONAL SECTION

In our outdoor cellar stairway, we have several webs of Achaearanea tepidariorum (C L Koch) in which one often finds Armadillidium vulgare. I have not observed the spiders feeding but I assume that they do. When a dead isopod is found in the web in the morning, it is gone by the next morning. In this same stairway there are always webs of Agelenopsis pennsylvanica (C L Koch) which makes a large funnel web, but I have never found isopods in these webs.

William F Rapp, 430 Ivy Avenue, Crete, Nebraska 68333, USA

WHO EATS WOODLICE?

David Hanson, on his annual survival course to Cape Wrath, that's who! David informs me that Ligia oceanica are rather tasteless and do not turn pink when

boiled. David also claims to be the only person in Britain to have been woken up by a Ligia oceanica as it took an early morning stroll across his face.

I have also received an interesting letter on the same topic from L B Holthuis (Rijksmuseum van Natuurlijke Historie, Raamsteeg 2, Leiden, The Netherlands), a section of which is reproduced below.

According to Houttuyn (1769, Linnaeus, *Natuurlijke Historie*, vol. 1 (Zool.), part 13, pp. 498-504, under Oniscus asellus and Oniscus armadillo), powder made of woodlice, mixed with other medicine or just taken plain with wine, is an excellent diuretic, and also helps to get rid of slimy or watery secretions of the body. So, mixed with gum-ammonia (whatever that is) and honey, the powder is supposed to help against coughs and all kinds of ailments of the lungs. The stuff was also prescribed for kidney stones. The diuretic properties of woodlice are probably the explanation of the vernacular Dutch word for woodlouse "pissebed", as the diuretic properties of the dandelion made the French word "pissenlit" for it. In 1939, the results of an investigation of the vernacular names for woodlice as used in the various parts of the Netherlands was published, with a map showing the distribution of the various terms. Apart from "pissebed" and its variations, most of the names included some reference to sow or boar, like in your English sow bug, and as found also in Porcellio in Indonesia (at least in some parts) where the woodlouse is called "tjeleng" (= wild boar). I did not find any reference to "donkey" in the Dutch vernacular names, but the Germans have their Keller-esel, and of course both Oniscus and asellus are derived from the word for donkey. Vernacular isopodology might be very rewarding!

ADDRESSES

All complete record cards, enquiries concerning the Isopod Survey Scheme and articles for inclusion in the newsletter or Isopoda should be sent to me at the following address:

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Department of Pure and Applied Zoology
University of Reading
PO Box 228
Whiteknights
Reading RG6 2AJ

Supplies of blank recording cards are available free from:

Biological Records Centre
Monks Wood Experimental Station
Abbots Ripton
Huntingdon
Cambs PE17 2LS

Newsletter 24 will appear in May 1988

Newsletter 23 edited by Steve Hopkin

THE 1987 INVERTERS GATHERING

By Noel Jackson

This ode was commissioned by Andy Keay and Dick Jones. Any resemblance to invertebratologists, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

There's a well known port town that's called Bristol,
In the new-fangled county A-von,
And the British (and foreign) woodlousers,
Went there one weekend for some fun.
There were one great, big fella called Tony,
Whoose face were covered with scar,
And he lay in a somnolent posture,
Resting his head on the bar.

Some disreputable types stood around him,
Arguing the toss about who,
Should Dick get the next round of whisky,
Or was it the turn of the screw?
Chairman Doug, who hails from Yorkshire,
Said "I'll pay for thy sup!"
Several moths flew from this wallet,
And Paul Harding was treated for shock.

Then the cloud of blue smoke in the corner,
Spoke in a voice soft but clear,
It was Gordon from Manchester Uni,
"Would someone please get him a beer?"
A cry arose of "Where's Adrian?"
Not being a great one for booze,
He'd just got three new county records
From the mud trapped in Helen Read's shoes.

Then Arthur went looking for Pauline,
Who was watering the plants in her car,
But he looked the wrong way down his binos,
And thus couldn't see very far.
An NCC man made suggestions,
'Bout fieldwork from the warmth of his bed,
And Ian from Wales made a comment,
But no-one understood what he'd said.

Then Andy and Dick's started shouting,
'Bout methods that they ought to use,
To extract invertebrate animals
From cracks in municipal loos.
Andy Keay preferred using his winkler,
An eight-inch long hardened steel tool,
But Dick said that he preferred jelly,
For banging away as a rule.

Steve Hopkin erected five species
As he walked cross the room to the bar,
He's a bit of a whizz kid at Reading,
'Specially now that he's got a new car.
Then John Lewis burst into the company
Shouting "Scutigera down near Taun-ton"
A great silence fell, then all as one,
With a rattle of tubes they were gone.

BISG PRIZE CROSSWORD - Number 1

What has George Fussey been up to since relinquishing the post of Scheme Organiser? The answer is compiling the BISG Crossword. The clues are given below. The first correct entry drawn from a hat at the BISG/BMG meeting in April 1988 will win a prize of £5.00 (total profits from the sale of Isopoda Volume 1). You do not have to attend the Meeting to enter.

Clues across

- ~~2~~ Specifically white (5)
- ~~4~~ Sauce cart (anag) (9)
- 11. See 16 across
- ~~12~~ Very small soil dwellers (8)
- 13. 17 across might over do it (3)
- ~~14~~ ----trichoniscoides celticus (4)
- ~~16~~ Preserve isopods, spiritually (7)
- 16 and 11. All square for BISG (3 + 2)
- ~~17~~ Marsupium? ---- pouch (5)
- ~~20~~ These pleopods might help identify (6)
- ~~21~~ Rare species in the middle of Grassington (5)
- ~~22~~ Genus, littorally (5)
- ~~24~~ Off-colour Trichoniscoides, only when dead (7)
- ~~27~~ Aspiring collector (6)
- ~~29~~ Pairs of legs in a woodlouse (5)
- ~~31~~ The Wizard of --, on the map (1,1)
- ~~33~~ Ubiquitous genus (7)
- ~~34~~ Back-endish (5)
- ~~37~~ This Forcellio's a real smoothie (6)

Clues down

- ~~1~~ Study of distribution and abundance (7)
- ~~3~~ Woodlouse watchers (1,1,1,1)
- ~~5~~ Two pairs, characteristic of 4 across (8)
- ~~6~~ Roll up, roll up! (13)
- 7. Woodlice? A speciality fang you very much! (7)
- ~~9~~ Say, what an attractive Forcellio (11)
- ~~9~~ Where it lives, in a chain store (7).
- 10. When BISG get together (6)
- ~~18~~ A relative of 22 across, fennily enough (8)
- ~~19~~ This wood holds a record or two (5)
- ~~20~~ A rough, common Forcellio (6)
- ~~23~~ A class where all pods are equal (3)
- ~~25~~ Woodlice by any other name (7)
- 26. Pods not quite in E.E.C. (3)
- ~~28~~ The last segment (6)
- ~~30~~ Looks like 6 across, but the ayes have it (5)
- ~~32~~ See you, woodlouse blood, elementary my dear Watson (2)
- ~~34~~ Crumbs!, let's get down to earth (4)
- ~~35~~ A brief species (2)