THE BRITISH ISOPODA STUDY GROUP

Newsletter of the Isopoda Survey Scheme

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May 1986

EDITORIAL

Following a democratic(!) decision at the Manchester meeting of the Isopod Group in April, it was agreed that George Fussey would relinquish the post of scheme organizer and that I would take over from 1 May 1986. Consequently, all records, queries about the Scheme and specimens for identification should be sent to:

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I'm sure we would all like to thank George for all his hard work in running the Scheme during the period between the end of phase 1 of recording in 1982 and publication of 'Woodlice in Britain and Ireland'. It takes a lot of time to identify and return specimens, let alone check 1666 record cards!

It is customary when taking over something new to pontificate on the way one hopes it will develop so, at the risk of sounding over-ambitious, here is my penny-worth.

The conservation of woodlice (and other "soil" invertebrates) should be considered when designating SSSIs and nature reserves. There are encouraging signs that conservation bodies are taking this more enlightened view. If you belong to a local natural history society, why not encourage a few people to take up woodlouse recording and raise the profile of isopods in your area!

It is very difficult to get financial support nowadays to conduct basic ecological research on invertebrates. This is an area in which amateur zoologists can make a real contribution to our science. Why not conduct your own project concentrating on a single species or genus in your area. Pam Copson has shown how easy it is to keep woodlice in culture and since very little is known about the ecology of most species, your findings will probably be unique. For example, many populations of Trichoniscus pusillus contain individuals which are a vivid purple colour. Is this contagious? What is the incidence of this colouration within and between populations and does it change with time?

"Research not published is work not done". I have felt for some time that we need a vehicle for the publication of relatively short articles on isopods which merit more than a paragraph in a Newsletter but which are not long enough (or boring enough!) to submit to a scientific journal. Following the lead set by the Myriapod Group and the success of their Bulletin, I have decided to produce a similar publication for articles on all aspects of isopod biology which will have a ISSN number and will therefore be citable. Further details will follow in the next Newsletter (copy deadline 31 August 1986) and I would be grateful for any comments from recorders on this and on any of the other suggestions made above. The title of this August publication will be Isopoda unless I receive a more original title!

I am firmly of the belief that the BRC recording schemes are the best way of encouraging amateur scientists and naturalists to learn about the 'lesser known' groups of invertebrates. We still have much to learn about the factors which control the ranges of woodlice and continued recording is the best way of obtaining a true picture of their national distribution. Just when we think we know the distribution of a species, it turns up way outside its presumed limits. I do not therefore envisage any major changes in the way the Scheme will be run for the the next few years. We still need more records so keep sending the cards!

BISG/BMG JOINT MEETING - SPRING 1986

A very successful joint meeting with the Myriapod Group was held in Manchester from 1 to 4 April thanks to efficient organization by Gordon Blower. A full report will follow in Newsletter 21. The spring 1987 meeting will again be held jointly with the Myriapod Group and will probably be based in Wiltshire.

SECOND INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON TERRESTRIAL ISOPODS
Urbino, Italy, 10-12 September 1986

After the successful first symposium held at London Zoo in 1983 organized by Stephen Sutton and David Holdich, a second such gathering of woodlousers from all parts of the globe will be held in Italy later this year. Will the desert isopod Hemilepistus again be the star of the conference or will a UK species steal the show? Full report in the next newsletter.

NEW DISTRIBUTION MAPS FOR WOODLICE

There are a number of schemes awaiting production of their first provisional atlases so it is unlikely that BRC will have the manpower to produce updated woodlice distribution maps for a couple of years. I have therefore taken temporary possession from BRC of all the post-atlas record cards from George Fussey's reign as scheme organizer (all 1666 of them!) with the object of updating by hand the maps in 'Woodlice in Britain and Ireland', at least for the species with less than 100 post-atlas records. These maps will include records to the end of 1986 and will be available for the field meeting of the Group in spring 1987.

	Post-Atlas records
Androniscus dentiger	180
Armadillidium album	6
Armadillidium depressum	32
Armadillidium nasatum	51
Armadillidium pictum	4
Armadillidium pulchellum	17
Armadillidium vulgare	444
Asellus aquaticus	42
Asellus cavaticus	0
Asellus communis	0
Asellus meridianus	4
Buddelundiella cataractae	0
Cylisticus convexus	45
Eluma purpurascens	8
Halophiloscia couchi	14
Halophiloscia zosterae	0
Haplophthalmus danicus	79

Haplophthalmus mengei	75
Ligia oceanica	69
Ligidium hypnorum	47
Metatrichoniscoides celticus	0
Miktoniscus patiencei	9
Oniscus asellus	1080
Oritoniscus flavus	5
Philoscia muscorum	729
Platyarthrus hoffmannseggi	169
Porcellio dilatatus	11
Porcellio laevis	5
Porcellio scaber	854
Porcellio spinicornis	62
Procellionides cingendus	59
Porcellionides pruinosus	46
Trachelipus rathkei	9
Trichoniscoides albidus	14
Trichoniscoides saeroeensis	26
Trichoniscoides sarsi	2
Trichoniscus pusillus ff.	746
Trichoniscus pygmaeus	144
TOTAL RECORDS	5095

from 1666 record cards

George Fussey 26 March 1986

HAVE YOU SEEN ASELLUS RECENTLY?

If so, you are keeping it a close secret! The late Professor Moon and Paul Harding produced a set of maps in 1981 which demonstrated the distribution of Asellus recorders as much as anything else. Since then the meagre flow of records has done little to improve our knowledge of the distribution of Asellus aquaticus and A. meridianus. 1986 looks like being another wet summer so lets have a few more records of freshwater isopods - there should be no lack of habitat for Asellus.

WHAT EATS WOODLICE?

The note reproduced below from P F Whitehead raises the interesting question of which animals predate on woodlice. In my own experience, centipedes and predatory beetles eat large numbers of newly released juvenile woodlice but will only eat the adults if they are injured or moulting. Any observations on this topic would be gratefully received.

PREDATION ON WOODLICE BY THE DEVIL'S COACH HORSE BEETLE Staphylinus (Ocypus) olens

On 14 April 1986 I encountered an adult Oniscus asellus being eaten by the larva of a staphylinid beetle. Field examination left me with little doubt that the larva was that of Staphylinus olens which does occur at the site, a rockery at Broadway, Worcestershire. They were found locked firmly together amongst the radical shoots of Veronica prostrata. Lifted up either by predator or prey, they at no time separated, and the mandibles of the larva had penetrated the capitular dorsum of the woodlouse. Although some of the

soft tissues beneath had been removed by the predator, the woodlouse was still alive. It seems likely that the woodlouse had dragged its predator into the tuft of foliage; two hours later there was no trace of them. This is the first occasion on which I have found an insect eating a woodlouse.

P F Whitehead, Moor Leys, Little Comberton, Pershore, Worcestershire.

DO ANTS PROVIDE FAST FOOD FOR WOODLICE?

Woodlice are often found in association with ants yet little is known of the relationship between the two animals. Platyarthrus hoffmannseggi is typically found in nests of various species of ants and apparently thrives in these communities. Adrian Rundle lists six species of ants with which Platyarthrus is associated in Bedfordshire (Newsletter 12) and in the same issue mentions that Trichoniscoides albidus has been found in the nest of Lasius niger.

What the benefits may be, for either animal, are still something of a mystery although Trevor Williams and Nigel Franks of the University of Bath have studied Platyarthrus with the host ant Lasius flavus and report that the woodlice gains nutritional benefits (Newsletter 19).

I am commencing a survey of the incidence of Platyarthrus, and other woodlice, with ants. The aim is to identify any preference for association with specific ant communities. It should also be possible to map any variation in such choice on a geographical basis.

When on collecting trips, if any woodlice are found with ants, I would be most grateful if samples of the ants and woodlice (preserved in 70% alcohol and fully labelled with site details) could be forwarded to me. Specimens will be returned if required.

Chris Hames, Department of Pure and Applied Zoology, University of Reading.

Remember, deadline for contributions for Newsletter 21 is August 31 so please put pen to paper before you go on holiday. Articles can be typed or hand written and should be sent to me at the address on the first page.

Newsletter 20 edited by Steve Hopkin