THE BRITISH ISOPOD STUDY GROUP

Newsletter of the Isopod Survey Scheme

Number 27 October 1989

EDITORIAL

Harding & Sutton's (1985) book Woodlice in Britain and Ireland : Distribution and Habitat provided us with a sound scientific basis on which to base statements on the distributions of the different species. However there is a clear need for a new key which has up to date information on distribution and includes the five species which have been discovered as new to Britain since 1972. By the time this Newsletter has been mailed, I hope to have delivered the first draft of a new AIDGAP key for woodlice to the Field Studies Council. A test version will be produced (as is the case with all AIDGAP keys) and all BISG members will have the opportunity to make comments on the layout, content etc. before the final version is produced.

Record cards continue to flood in at a healthy rate. I have been pleased to welcome several new recorders to the Scheme, some from areas which so far have been under-recorded. BISG received a mention in the 1989 Bulletin of the Orkney Field Club and I am hoping that someone will prove me wrong in my assertion that 'there are no more than six species of woodlice in Orkney'. Steve Gregory has been busy in the Oxford region and is providing us with several interesting records, particularly of Haplophthalmus mengei which has still not been found in the same site as Haplophthalmus montivagus. Tony Irwin has also been busy this summer and has turned up a female Metatrichoniscoides celticus on the Giant's Causeway, Northern Ireland. Paul Whitehead has also added Vice Counties 33 and 37 to the list for Porcellio dilatatus

The recent concern over global warming has meant that politicians are beginning to recognise the value of long-term observations and data sets. Biological recording is a prime example of such long-term research, indeed, changes in the distribution of particular species may provide the most sensitive indicator of climatic change. However, if we are to detect such changes in distribution, it is important that repeated visits are made to sites otherwise we shall never be sure if species are really expanding their range or are merely being discovered in sites which have not previously been visited. Care should also be taken in separating range expansion into suitable sites centred on a relatively recent introduction (possibly Eluma purpurascens and Armadillidium depressum) from genuine expansion of range due to colonisation of sites which become suitable due to climatic change. In the latter category, species which have a restricted range but which have probably been here for some time should be watched especially carefully. If the greenhouse effect takes hold, perhaps we shall see Trachelipus rathkei spreading to all parts of Britain!

BISG/BMG FIELD MEETING 1990

Helen Read is organising next year's meeting which will be held from 19th to 22nd April at Thornham Field Centre in Suffolk. Details and a booking form are attached. If you wish to attend, please return the booking form to Helen (not to me!) as soon as possible.

ISOPOD COLLECTING ON THE ISLE OF MAY - JUNE 1989

The Isle of May, which is included in VC85 (Fife) and 100 km square NT(36), is situated at the mouth of the Firth of Forth. The island is small, 1.6 km x 0.25 km, rising to a maximum height of 51 metres. There are very few tress and only small beaches. It is a National Nature Reserve, the property of the Nature Conservancy Council, to whom it was made over in June 1989 by the Commissioners of Northern Lights. There is self-catering accomodation for not more than six persons (bird watchers preferred) at the Low Light. I was able to stay there for three full days (28 to 30 June) in order to collect Isopoda (and Myriapoda) for which I had an N.C.C. permit.

In the definitive book on the Island by Dr. W.J. Eggeling The Isle of May, there are listed the following species (Appendix III), much of which is said to date back to Evans c. 1919. These are in the left-hand column. In the right hand column are the species I was able to find.

Isopoda (Eggeling)	Isopoda (Rawcliffe)
*Cylisticus convexus	Cylisticus convexus
*Ligia oceanica	Ligia oceanica
*Oniscus asellus	Oniscus asellus
*Porcellio scaber	Porcellio scaber
*Porcellio spinicornis	Porcellio spinicornis
Trichoniscus pusillus	Trichoniscus pusillus
Trichoniscus pygmaeus	Haplophthalmus 'mengei'
Trichoniscoides sarsi	Philoscia muscorum

* These are recorded as having been collected by the Nature Conservancy in 1958

In 1986, one of the N.C.C. wardens found Ligia oceanica, Oniscus asellus, Philoscia muscorum and Porcellio scaber by pitfall trapping. Hand collecting, hampered by some inclement weather on the 28th and 30th June 1989, was confined to the disused gardens/trapping areas, the beach at Kirkhaven and the gully below the Low Light. It will be seen that no spectacular finds were made. Trichoniscoides sarsi I would have thought as somewhat unlikely and it was a pity that I only managed a female Haplophthalmus 'mengei'. I must go back next year to try for a male.

ALBINO WOODLICE

My article on this subject in Isopoda Volume 3 has encouraged Arthur Chater and Pam Copson to write with details of albino isopods. Arthur found an albino Oniscus asellus on 25 August 1981 in Perthshire (27/423 577) in litter under Salix scrub under a large piece of porcelain on the west side of a railway embankment at Rannoch Station. There were eight 'normal' specimens and one albino female c. 12 mm in length with a pale yellowish-white body and pure white and translucent edges. He did not collect the specimen. Pam reports that some years ago she was telling 'a poor archaeologist who had ventured into the biology preserve' about the different colours that woodlice can have - 'purple, pink and even white eyeless jobs which live only in ant hills' when the person protested that she'd seen white ones in her flat (a bedsitter in darkest Leamington Spa). 'Sure enough, the next day a totally white unpigmented Porcellio scaber arrived on my desk in a matchbox!'

ADDRESSES

All completed 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:

Dr. Steve Hopkin
School of Animal and Microbial Sciences
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

Please discard record cards which were printed on both sides (the shiny ones). A new card containing all the species name changes since 1982 (and adding Haplophthalmus montivagus!) will be produced when the current stock of cards is exhausted.

Newsletter 28 will appear in May 1990.

Newsletter 27 edited by Steve Hopkin.