

NEWSLETTER OF THE ISOPOD SURVEY SCHEME

No. 1

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PLEASE KEEP THIS FOR FUTURE REFERENCE

In the first issue of the Newsletter we will outline the progress of the survey scheme so far, clarify various points concerning the instruction sheet and give the first of a series of regular features on particular habitats and the woodlice that may be found in them. In the future it is also intended to provide hints on identifying difficult species and advice on using Edney's key. One species will be dealt with at a time and the first is likely to be *Porcellio scaber*.

1 PROGRESS OF THE SCHEME.

Since it was launched in December the scheme has gathered considerable momentum. About thirty firm offers of help have been received and the general response has been very favourable. A hard core of fifty regular recorders is the aim — the volume of records and specimens which can be dealt with is limited — and it is felt that we are likely to reach this target within the year.

2 PUBLICITY

Notices of the scheme have appeared in various publications of wide circulation, and Mr. L. Christie has kindly offered to distribute an appeal for recorders. A talk at the 'South London' was well received and will be published in the Transactions of that Society. A number of lectures of this type have been arranged over the next twelve months, as they are clearly a most effective way of stimulating interest.

3 COVERAGE

The more remote areas of the British Isles are a problem. We are very fortunate in that one of us (P.T.H.) has collected extensively in Ireland, but we have very little information from the Highlands of Scotland. If funds become available a small expedition will be mounted to fill in the gaps, and already we have arrangements for collections to be made on Deeside and the Sutherland coast. Coverage can never approach that of the larger surveys, e.g. the Flora or the Lepidoptera, but it should be possible within five years to provide a broad picture of the British distribution for most of the species on the card (some of which are not native — more of this

in the next Newsletter). This should provide a useful background for the study of habitat preferences which is the more important part of the survey.

4 PUBLISHED RECORDS

The task of putting published records of distribution on to cards has begun, with over 1,000 cards completed. There is a large (but not overwhelming) body of information still to be extracted.

5 FINANCES

I.B.M. (United Kingdom) have generously made a small grant towards the expenses of the survey. Application is being made to other organisations for support, and a body called 'The British Isopoda Study Group' is being set up to act as a financial parent for the scheme and a focal point for the study of woodlice and other isopods. Considerable thought is being given to the long term financial requirements of the Group and the ways in which money can be found.

6 HABITATS - 1

COLLECTING ON COASTAL SAND DUNES AND SHORE-LINE LITTER.

Six species of woodlice are typical of sand dune systems, and perhaps twice as many may be found in shore-line litter. In general the most productive systems are those in the South and West of the country, and the most productive zones within each system are the damper and more sheltered ones.

DUNE SLACKS - areas lower than the actual dune slopes which may be flooded with fresh water in the winter, the flora often including mosses, *Juncus* spp. and *Salix repens*.

DUNE GRASSLAND - stabilised dunes where *Ammophila* (Marram Grass) is scarce, but where a lush grassland has developed. *Philoscia muscorum* is often abundant unless there is heavy grazing. In the 'mobile' dunes large stabilised *Ammophila* tussocks provide day-time shelter for woodlice, particularly *Porcellio scaber* and *Armadillidium vulgare*. The bare sand between tussocks (called a 'Blow-Out' when caused by wind action) provides no shelter for woodlice, but dead and dying specimens may be found there by day.

DUNE HEATH - (found in some well established systems) - areas of low vegetation (*Polytrichum* and lichens) with a leached soil. Few woodlice are found here except *Platyarthrus hoffmannseggii* where ants are present.

The woodlice of dune systems in approximate order of abundance are: *P. scaber*, *P. muscorum*, *A. vulgare*, *Oniscus asellus*, *Trichoniscus pusillus* and *P. Hoffmannseggi*. A useful item of equipment when collecting in dunes (or grassland for that matter) is a bread knife for cutting into dense tussocks of grass or *Juncus*.

The species found in Shore-line Litter include (in order of abundance): *P. scaber*, *A. vulgare*, *Ligia oceanica*, *Cylisticus convexus*, *A. album* and *Metoponorthus cingendus* (the last three are not common). *P. muscorum* occurs high up on the more sheltered shore-lines where large pieces of timber have been washed up among the vegetation by high spring tides. This is a good habitat for other woodlice also. In Ireland *Eluma purpurascens*, *Oritoniscus flavus* and *Metoponorthus melanurus* are known from a few shore localities. *Halophiloscia couchi* may also turn up — this needs investigation.

7 AMENDMENTS TO THE COLLECTOR CARD

It has been decided to expand and define 'Mire'. Strictly speaking 'Mire' may be applied only to peaty formations, but for the purposes of the Survey it will cover the following:

Estuarine marsh
Dry ditch
Fen
Bog — upland
Bog — lowland

ESTUARINE MARSH — areas of vegetation covered regularly by tidal salt water, whether twice daily or only by spring tides.

DRY DITCH — a drainage or boundary ditch not containing water but with a damp environment, and often with a dense compacted litter layer.

FEN — fresh-water and non-acid areas of *Phragmites/Calamagrostis/Molinia* grassland with numerous forbs but without Carr (scrub) or 'Fen woodland' (woodland). Nearly all marshes will come into this category.

BOG - areas of acid wet land, with a moss-dominated vegetation (usually *Sphagnum*) but with scattered *Carex*, *Juncus* and other forbs. In the analysis 'Bog' will be divided into 'Upland' and 'Lowland', and the basis of the altitude given.

8 USE OF THE 'OTHER INFORMATION' SPACE

Classification of habitats, as on the card, inevitably results in a great loss of detailed information. This has to be accepted if a very large volume of data is going to be processed, as this can only be done by putting the data on punched card which can be processed by computer and/or mechanical sorter. However, recorders are strongly urged to make good use of the space provided for extra notes as these will be particularly noted.

THE NEXT NEWSLETTER IS ALMOST READY AND WILL APPEAR IN A FEW WEEKS TIME.

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