

THE BRITISH ISOPOD STUDY GROUP

Newsletter of the Isopod Survey Scheme

Number 25

September 1988

EDITORIAL

Several items in the last newsletter (no 24) prompted some interesting correspondence, details of which are recounted below. Record cards continue to be sent in at an encouraging rate (c. 300 since May) and although there have been no spectacular finds that I know of over the summer, every card makes an important contribution to the continuing success of the scheme. I made a return visit to St Bees in Cumbria in August and although I didn't manage to find any more Metatriconiscoides celticus (see newsletter no 23), I did find a large, and clearly well-established, population of Triconiscoides albidus on the banks of the stream which flows on to the beach. This is still the only record for western Britain but the species must surely be present in many other Atlantic-facing coastal sites. Who will be the first to record T. albidus from Wales?

Concerning 'passive transport of woodlice' (see newsletter no 24) I was reminded of a photograph taken by Franco Ferrara of a column of army ants which was in a poster display at the Second International Symposium on the Biology of Terrestrial Isopods held in Urbino, Italy, in 1986. One of the ants was transporting in its jaws, a pupae on the side of which was attached a Platyarthrus! In the UK we have no idea how our own species, Platyarthrus hoffmannseggii, gets from nest to nest. I will publish any theories in the next newsletter, however outlandish!

ISOPODA

Isopoda vol 2 has now sold more copies than vol 1 at the equivalent time after publication and there are several institutions, both here and abroad, which have taken out subscriptions. Material is needed now for vol 3. Several isopodologists have indicated their intention to submit articles on a wide range of topics (woodlice in Japan, current status of Asellus spp. in Britain etc) and these are required by the end of the year, or early 1989, to allow for publication before the spring 1989 BISG meeting in Devon. If you are contemplating writing something, please let me know as soon as possible.

Following recent newsletter articles on colour varieties of UK isopods, I am preparing an article for Isopoda vol 3 which will summarize current knowledge on this topic. If you have made any unusual finds, it would be very helpful if you could send me details as soon as possible. Records of 'albino' woodlice are particularly needed.

ALTERNATIVE WOODLICE

In July 1988, I made a return (and rather more frenetic!) visit to the Llysdinam Field Centre with a party of 20 undergraduate zoology students, for their 'terrestrial and freshwater' field course. One of the excursions involved a trip to the 'Centre for Alternative Technology' at Machynlleth, a fascinating project where practical examples of energy conservation (solar and wind power etc) are displayed, together with the latest ideas on organic

farming. Male visitors (I'm not sure about the ladies) are requested to make their contribution to the nutrient balance of the site by urinating into a plastic container which is emptied at regular intervals onto the vegetable plots where it makes an excellent fertilizer. The woodlice certainly seem to thrive at the site - I have never seen so many Porcellionides pruinosus. Dozens of this attractive plum-coloured isopod were present under every stone, rotting log etc. It just goes to show, 'where there's muck there's Porcellionides pruinosus'!

Also on the organic gardening theme, I had a letter in May from Lawrence Hills, the President of the Henry Doubleday Research Association, a body which promotes the control of pests by natural, rather than chemical means. Mr Hills had discovered a reference on page 78 of Beneficial Insects and Mites (sic) (HGDI - HMSO Bulletin no 20) which suggested that woodlice ate the eggs and larvae of cabbage white butterflies. It transpired, however, that this conclusion had been extrapolated from an earlier publication in which woodlice had been shown to respond positively, in a serological test, to eggs of the cinnibar moth (the larvae of which feed on ragwort). Mr Hills has asked me to publish this information in case any BISG members have observed woodlice eating Lepidoptera, particularly the eggs. Write to me in the first instance and I will forward letters on to Mr Hills.

WOODLICE - LATEST COLOURS

Many recorders have reported finding the bright mauve form of Trichoniscus pusillus (due probably to infection with an iridovirus) but a new colour variety of this species has turned up in recent months. Gordon Corbet uncovered two species of T. pusillus which were 'a beautiful apricot yellow in life' (although the colour had faded in alcohol by the time I saw them) from under pieces of a limestone wall which had collapsed into a beech/sycamore wood in the Cotswolds. Adrian Fowles has also found yellow T. pusillus in an inland mixed wooded dingle in vc 46 in May. The specimen was a gravid female. The three ocelli on each side of the head could be seen clearly in oblique light confirming the identification. It was too large to be Trichoniscus pygmaeus.

SPECIMEN TUBES

I get frequent enquiries as to possible sources of small quantities of plastic topped glass specimen tubes. Most manufacturers seem only to supply these in large quantities. However, Bob George of 54 Richmond Park Avenue, Queen's Park, Bournemouth BH8 9DR, is able to supply these in small quantities, together with other useful items (forceps etc). If you are interested, please write directly to Bob and not to me. If anyone knows of any other suitable sources of the tools of the isopodologists trade, I would be happy to publish these in the newsletter.

AN UNUSUAL USE FOR WOODLICE

Vertebrate anatomists do not confine their attention to vertebrates! A paper by V C Maiorana and L M Van Valen (1985) in Systematic Zoology, 34, 242-245, describes how colonies of Armadillidium vulgare and Porcellio scaber are used in their laboratory for the cleaning of delicate vertebrate skeletons. Carcasses of small birds and mammals are left in the colonies for a few weeks during which time the woodlice remove every last scrap of flesh from the

bones. The skeletons can then be removed in pristine condition with all articulations intact. The authors comment that isopods do not create a mess and that there is no danger to teaching or research collections if they escape because they desiccate so rapidly.

GAMES WOODLICE PLAY

On 11 May 1988 at Childswickham, Worcestershire, I made a remarkable observation involving two Armadillidium vulgare. On lifting a sheet of corrugated asbestos, I observed a red adult lying on its back, slightly curled holding a smaller totally curled adult in its legs. The latter woodlouse was being revolved rapidly with perfect control and symmetry by the legs of the other, a performance watched by the writer with incredulity, and regrettably no camera. The display of exhibitionism continued for some 20 seconds.

P F Whitehead, Moor Leys, Little Comberton, Pershore, Worcs WR10 3EP

FILLING IN RECORD CARDS - DO'S AND DONT'S

1. Use BRC cards and not photocopies. Some cards (the shiny ones) were printed on both sides in error. If you use these, fill in one side only and score a line across the back.
2. Fill in Asellus records on a separate card to records for terrestrial species.
3. Use black ink on the cards as they are often photocopied.
4. The first two boxes in the space for the OS grid reference should contain numbers not letters (a conversion chart is available from me or BRC).
5. Cross through the names of species recorded, not their BRC code number.

Adherence to these rules will save me and BRC a lot of time and frustration. Thank you for your co-operation!

Steve Hopkin

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

Please note that my new telephone number is (0734) 875123 ext 7063.

Supplies of blank recording cards are available free from:

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

Newsletter 26 will appear in May 1989

Newsletter 25 edited by Steve Hopkin

1989 ISOPOD & MYRIAPOD STUDY GROUPS FIELD MEETING, HALLSANNERY, DEVON.

BOOKING FORM

Hallsannery Field Centre, Bideford, Devon. EX39 5HE (tel. 02372 72135)

The Field Centre is one mile south of Bideford on the A386, grid ref. 21/457248. Those approaching from the south will probably overshoot the entrance at the first attempt.

Prices for full board and use of all facilities are:

£18 per person per night for twin or double rooms.

£19 per person per night for single rooms.

Should numbers staying at the Centre exceed 27, four rooms can be made to accommodate three or more people. If you are willing to share with two or more others please indicate this on the booking form. Where three or more share a room the cost is £17 per night.

There are only three single and two double rooms available. These will be allocated to the first people requesting them. If demand exceeds supply people will be given the option of sharing at Hallsannery or finding other accommodation in the area. Bideford has plenty of hotels and guest houses. Anyone opting to stay elsewhere is welcome to take their evening meals at Hallsannery. These will be at 8pm on the 30th and 7pm on other evenings.

Midday meals for those staying at Hallsannery consist of serve-yourself sandwiches, fruit, crisps and a chocolate biscuit and are available immediately after breakfast.

I hope that there will be the usual evening of talks and recording scheme progress reports on the Saturday. If you would like to give a presentation lasting up to 15 minutes please send me a title on your booking form. Offers to organise events for the Thursday and Friday evenings (e.g. identification workshops) will be favourably received.

The field centre has a laboratory which will be available for identification work at all times. It includes four binocular microscopes. The centre also boasts a range of computers. Should any higher-tech members of the study groups wish to make use of them, please confer with Pete Jollands at Hallsannery rather than trying to pass unintelligible queries via me.

There are two copies of the booking form overleaf to enable you to keep one copy for reference.

John Bratton 14/July/1988

Please return the form overleaf with £10 deposit to John Bratton, Nature Conservancy Council; Northminster House, Peterborough PE1 1UA by Jan 20th. Please mark your envelopes PERSONAL (otherwise the envelope will be opened and your cheque removed by NCC'S postal staff). Make cheques payable to J. Bratton NOT to the NCC.