

SOME OBSERVATIONS OF *STENOPHILOSCIA ZOSTERAE* (VERHOEFF, 1928) AT COLNE POINT NNR, NORTH ESSEX

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Stenophiloscia zosteræ was first recorded in Britain from specimens collected in pitfall-traps on Slapton shingle ridge (20/82-43-) in south Devon between 1974 and 1977 (Harding, Cotton & Rundle 1980). A second specimen was pitfalled at Scolt Head Island NNR (53/81-46-) in Norfolk in 1977 and a live specimen collected by hand at Goldhanger in Essex (62/90-07-) in 1976. All were collected from between the high water mark and the storm drift line on unvegetated shores composed of shingle or sand (Harding *et al* 1980). Further pitfall trapping and hand searching (both day and night) failed to produce additional material (Harding & Sutton 1985). It was nearly two decades later before another specimen came to light. A second live specimen was found under driftwood in the strandline of a vegetated shingle spit at Shingle Street (62/37-44-) in Suffolk (Daws 1995).

During the BMIG field meeting to Essex in April 2000 the authors visited Colne Point NNR in north Essex (53/10-12-). Woodlice were mainly collected by turning pieces of driftwood a few metres either side of the strandline along several hundred metres of a sparsely vegetated sandy shingle beach. A small pinkish species, which could not be identified in the field, but somewhat reminiscent of a large pale *Trichoniscus pusillus*, was found clinging to the underside of most pieces of driftwood. Specimens tended to remain stationary when disturbed and the antennal flagella seemed to be composed of three distinct segments. A few specimens were collected, including two males, which upon examination were quite clearly *S. zosteræ*. Other woodlice found in small numbers were *T. pusillus*, *Philoscia muscorum*, *Porcellio scaber* and the rare pill-bug *Armadillidium album*.

Based on the appearance of preserved specimens (ie slender with long legs) Hopkin (1991) suggests that *S. zosteræ* may be capable of rapid movement when disturbed. Oliver & Meehan (1993) simply describe it as a 'runner capable of rapid movement when disturbed'. Having observed numerous live specimens in the field (perhaps up to a hundred) this is clearly not the case. The majority of specimens remained stationary when disturbed and even when provoked

with a finger did little more than walk into the nearest crevice within the driftwood. This slow moving behaviour, if typical, is a useful field character. Firstly there is plenty of time to collect a specimen for confirmation. Secondly, if the specimen disappears at great speed into the underlying shingle (a favourite trick of the superficially similar *Halophiloscia couchi*) it is probably not *S. zosteræ*.

As to the perennial question: is *S. zosteræ* extremely rare or extremely elusive? It has long been thought to be extremely elusive and for this reason has been omitted from the British Red Data Book which documents rare and vulnerable species. The discovery at Colne Point NNR of large numbers with relative ease, after an absence from the county of 25 years, supports this belief: this observation being an anomalous occurrence, possibly triggered by a combination of factors, such as climatic conditions. In addition the site has been well worked by the Essex Spider Group, by hand searching and pitfall trapping, and the species has not been seen before (pers comm P.R. Harvey). On current evidence the species is widespread along the coast of East Anglia and could be expected to turn up on other undisturbed sandy shingle shorelines along the east and south coasts. Anyone collecting from such habitats should keep a look out for anything that is reminiscent of a large pinkish *Trichoniscus* or a small slow moving *H. couchi*. It could just be *S. zosteræ*.

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