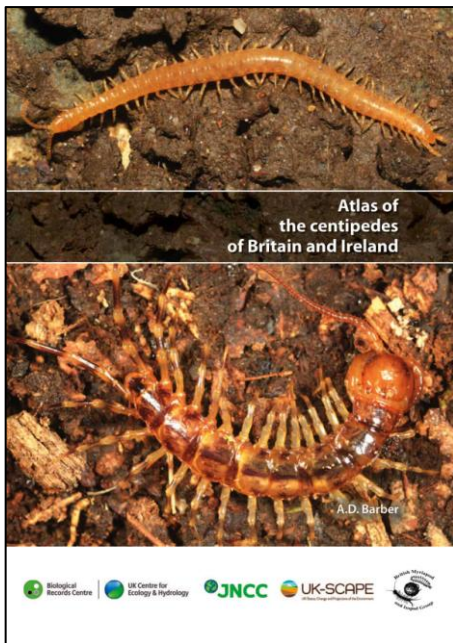

Book Reviews

Atlas of the Centipedes of Britain and Ireland



By A.D. Barber

December 2022, published by Field Studies Council.

ISBN: 9781906698812

Softback, 390 pp., 136 photos, 138 illustrations, 61 distribution maps and 94 tables; all in colour.

The atlas can be purchased directly from the Field Studies Council, <https://www.field-studies-council.org/shop/publications/centipedes-atlas/>, or via all good bookshops. Price c. £35.

In 1988 Tony Barber was joint author of the *Provisional atlas of the centipedes of the British Isles* (Barber & Keay, 1988), which mapped the then known distribution of 41 species and provided an analysis of the available habitat data collated through the recording scheme. Since that date (some thirty years ago!) considerable advances have been made in our knowledge and understanding of the distribution and habitat requirements of our

centipede fauna, including the discovery of several additional species. Thus, the publication of Tony's update, the *Atlas of the Centipedes of Britain and Ireland*, was eagerly anticipated.

The first section provides considerable information about how the recording scheme operated and what went before even BMG (British Myriapod Group) was formed, highlighting key researchers from the foundations laid by the likes of W.E. Leach in 1814 to Ted Eason's work in the 20th Century. The bulk of the book comprises detailed species accounts, based on over 53,000 records, for all 55 species now known from Britain, Ireland, Isle of Man and Channel Islands. It includes introduced 'indoor' species currently only known from within heated glasshouse such as those found at botanic gardens. The final section includes an appendix comprising a series of 32 tables summarising the data from records of all species.

Maps 1 and 2 summarise the number of species recorded from each hectad (10km square) and per vice county, respectively. The hectad map highlights areas where recording has been patchy (notably much of Scotland and Ireland) and, interestingly, key areas where recorders have been particularly active (e.g. Oxfordshire and Derbyshire). The highest species diversity lies in southern coastal counties (with 30 or more species per vice-county) with a gradual decline further north (18 species or less in Scotland). Species distribution maps are plotted at 10km square resolution and differentiated into four date classes: pre 1930; 1930-1959; 1960-1989 (these years encompassing the publication of identification keys to British and Irish species, setting up of BMG and the Centipede Recording Scheme and culminating in the publication of the 1988 *Provisional Atlas*); and 1990 to 2018 (which conveniently fits into my personal recording era). Where appropriate records have been differentiated between indoor (inside buildings, glasshouse, etc) and outdoor occurrences. However, the *Centipede Atlas* is much more than just 'dots on maps'. There is a detailed account for each species, including identification hints, notes on its occurrence in Britain and Ireland and colour photographs for most species. For all species with more than 30 records (the majority) there is a detailed analysis (presented as tables) of the associated data, including regional distribution, principle habitat preferences, ecotone, phenology, altitude data, collecting method, etc.

The most commonly recorded species is the large, conspicuous and ubiquitous *Lithobius forficatus* with over 10,000 records from more than 2,200 hectads. For many species clear distribution patterns emerge from the data, which, typically, were only hinted at in the *Provisional Atlas*. Perhaps the most striking example is that of *Lithobius variegatus*, a large and conspicuous centipede that is readily identifiable in the field. There are about 7,800 records for this ‘common’ centipede, but its distribution shows a distinct east/west divide, being strikingly absent from much of eastern England (except Kent!) and in Scotland it is pretty much restricted to western areas. Several species that are widespread across Britain are shown to be rare or absent in Ireland, notably *Lithobius calcaratus*. Species such as *Geophilus osquidatum* exhibit a typical south-western ‘Atlantic’ distribution, whereas others, such as *Lithobius muticus*, show a predominantly south-eastern ‘Continental’ distribution. Several species, such as *Geophilus seurati*, are restricted to coastal habitats. In the case of *Lithobius lapidicola* there is a stark contrast between a wide scattering of coastal sites in the south and east and widely scattered inland sites from inside heated glasshouses. And then there’s the ‘hard core’ northern contingency: *Geophilus proximum*, a widespread Scandinavian centipede that is only known from Unst, in the far north of Shetland. In a few cases it is apparent that the plotted species distributions reflect recorder activity! For example, the discrete blocks of records in Oxfordshire for the notoriously elusive *Schendyla dentata* and *Henia brevis* simply reflect targeted surveys undertaken there in the 1990s.

There are also a number of disjunct European wide distributions highlighted. For example *Stigmatogaster souletina* is known from the Falmouth area of Cornwall and the Pyrenees, while *Lithobius lucifugus* is known from a few widely scattered sites in Scotland, but otherwise predominantly a montane species of central Europe. It is quite likely that both species are chance introductions in Britain.

The comprehensive text and up-to-date maps of *Atlas of the Centipedes of Britain and Ireland* highlights the progress that has been achieved in the 30 years since the *Provisional Atlas* and provide a valuable resource of habitat data stretching back over 50 years. Although the maps will gradually become out-of-date as a result of continued recording, the text will certainly remain a primary go-to source of information about British and Irish centipedes for many decades to come.

If you do not have a copy of the *Centipede Atlas* I thoroughly recommend acquiring one.

Steve Gregory

Reference

Barber, A.D. & Keay, A.N. (1988). *Provisional atlas of the centipedes of the British Isles*. NERC, Huntingdon.