

BMIG Newsletter 50 | Spring 2026





British Myriapod and Isopod Group - discovering millipedes, centipedes, woodlice and other isopods in Britain and Ireland

BMIG mission statement 2021:

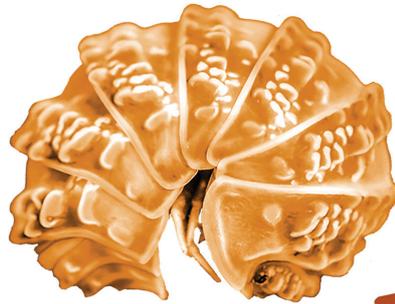
The British Myriapod and Isopod Group (BMIG) aims to improve awareness and knowledge of centipedes, millipedes and other Myriapoda, woodlice, waterlice and intertidal Isopoda and related species in Britain and Ireland.

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Cover Photo: **Tygarrup javanicus** Attems, 1929, Somerset (top), **Phyto discrepans** Pandellé, 1896, Cornwall (left). **Agabiformis lentus** (Budde-Lund, 1885), Essex (right). ©Thomas Hughes





ISTIB13

IRAKLEIO 2-5 JULY 2026, CRETE - GREECE

13th International Symposium on the Biology of Terrestrial Isopods (ISTIB13)

The Hellenic Institute of Speleological Research (HISR) and the Natural History Museum of Crete (NHMC) of the University of Crete, invite you to the 13th International Symposium on the Biology of Terrestrial Isopods (ISTIB13) to be held at the premises of the NHMC, in Irakleion (alt. spelling: Heraklion) city, Crete, Greece, from 2 to 5 July 2026, celebrating the return of ISTIB to Crete after 25 years.

The ISTIB series, aiming to bring together all colleagues studying the amazing Oniscidea, began in 1983 in London, UK, and has continued undisrupted every 3 to 4 years: Urbino, Italy (1986); Poitiers, France (1990); Haifa, Israel (1997); Irakleion, Greece (2001); Aveiro, Portugal (2004); Tunis, Tunisia (2007); Bled, Slovenia (2011), Poitiers, France (2014), Budapest, Hungary (2017), Ghent, Belgium (2021 – virtual due to the Covid-19 pandemic),

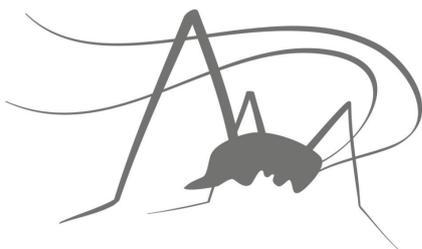
and Olomouc, The Czech Republic (2023).

Like all previous meetings, ISTIB13 accommodates contributions from all fields that use and/or focus on our beloved animals, such as taxonomy/systematics, evolutionary biology, morphology/anatomy, developmental biology, (eco)physiology, ecology, biogeography, molecular biology, behavior, etc.

More Details regarding the symposium can be found in the ISTIB website here:

https://www.istib.eu/?fbclid=IwY2xjawQp5BhleHRu-A2FlbQlxMABzcnRjBmFwcF9pZBAyMjIwMzIxNzg4M-jAwODkyAAEe-UfenGN_InRGNtZBVh934BHypo8W_HX6cPPNWbdTNxBY94oBYyLGDgJQ67Q_aem_lf-CAufJn5LypmRc20Ubm9Q

Don't forget to register early or submit your Abstracts by the 15th May 2026.



**Hellenic Institute of
Speleological Research**



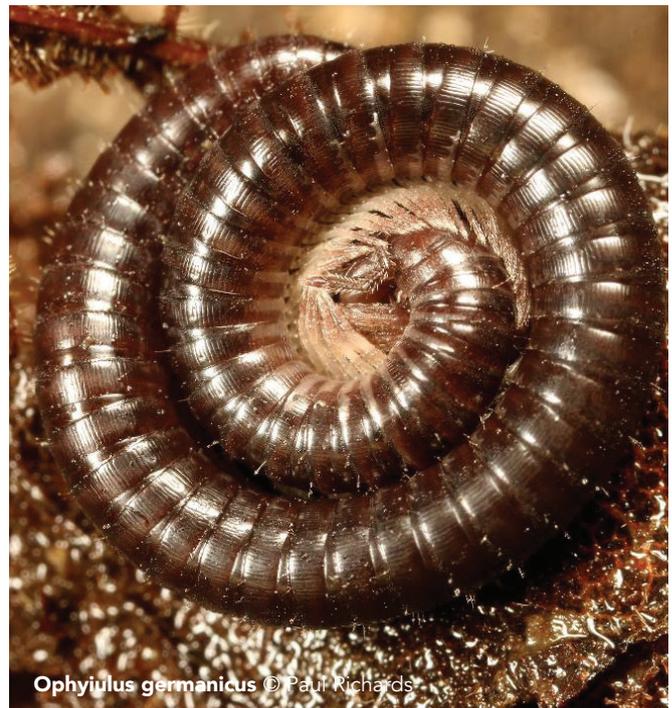
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History
Museum
of Crete**

UNIVERSITY OF CRETE





Cylindroiulus londinensis © Paul Richards



Ophiulus germanicus © Paul Richards

Two new millipedes for Sheffield in one day - Paul Richards -

In a casual turning of leaf-litter on a freezing cold lunch-time in Whinfell Quarry Gardens in Sheffield recently, I was very pleased to find two new species of millipede to the area; *Ophiulus germanicus* and *Cylindroiulus londinensis*. Neither had been recorded previously within the Sorby Natural History Society recording area, which covers the forty-nine 10Km squares around Sheffield. A return visit the next day confirmed that they were quite numerous among the mainly oak litter at the quarry base of this small ornamental garden. Just to add some confusion, *Ophiulus pilosus* was also quite numerous. Other locally scarce species found alongside, were *Allajulus nitidus*, *Chordeuma proximum* and *Melogona gallica* for each of which there are barely 3 or 4 local sites. It will be very interesting to see what is around there in the spring, though it clearly pays to persevere in the cold, wet days of January.

iNaturalist and the BMIG recording schemes - Steve Gregory -

Research Grade records from iNaturalist continue to feed into iRecord and following verification (by myself and Warren Maguire for intertidal isopods) into their

respective BMIG recording schemes. In 2025 this consisted of 734 centipede records, 1,420 millipede records and 6,605 isopod records (including freshwater and intertidal species). However, there have also been a large number of 'older' records going back many years that had been sat unidentified within iNat's back log. In some extreme cases specimens were vaguely identified as 'Arthropoda' and others were entirely mis-identified, such as centipedes mis-identified as annelid worms and a *Polydesmus* millipede as a glow-worm! To this end I am very grateful to iNat user Liam Keane for his perseverance in trawling through the iNaturalist archives to ensure that those centipede, millipede and woodlice observations that can be identified to species (and that I had previously missed!) make it through the system and into the BMIG recording schemes.

Liam has also proved to be a valuable recorder of BMIG species despite only working with live specimens, often encased in a 'conference badge holder' and aided by a cheap clip-on magnifying lens attached to his phone. Since joining iNat in October 2024 he has contributed over 1000 verified records to the BMIG recording schemes, mostly from Somerset. This includes the centipedes *Lamyctes africanus* (4th UK record) and the elusive *Henia brevis*. An excursion into south Wales resulted in a new site for the millipede *Turdulisoma turdulorum*, dangerously close (c. 10km) to the English border! Woodlice finds include *Philoscia affinis*, *T. sarsi*

s.l. and *Halophiloscia couchii* (the latter from Devon). All identified from live specimens with images showing key identification features. An example of one of Liam's recent records (for a live *Geophilus electricus* imaged in the field without microscope!) can be seen at: https://irecord.org.uk/record-details?occurrence_id=50029157.

Identifying Live British and Irish Myriapods

- Liam Keane -

Identifying live British and Irish myriapods can be quite challenging due to their identification features usually being quite small. Below are a few ways that I have been using to identify living myriapods over the past 1-2 years. Disclaimer: I am not claiming to have invented these techniques and I am aware they have probably been used by many people before me. This is just a collection of things I have found useful.

A conference badge holder will become your new best friend when you are out looking for myriapods. This allows you to gently contain and restrain the myriapod to be able to look at and photograph the ID features (thank you to Steve for informing me about this technique). In addition to this, I have occasionally used 2 microscope slides stacked on top of each other with a small piece of blu-tack at either end. The organism never comes into contact with the blu-tack, it is only there to adjust how tightly the slides are held together. This is a lot trickier than using a conference badge holder and gives the myriapod more chance to escape.

A small plastic tub or a petri dish is useful when collecting specimens. When I pick up specimens, I usually end

up picking up a lot of debris with it. Debris can make the conference badge holder dirty and obscure the organism. I usually place the specimen in a plastic tub or petri dish and remove the dirt/debris with tweezers before transferring it to the conference badge holder. Tissues or a cloth are useful to use to clean the conference badge holder from dirt and moisture.

A torch can be quite helpful to highlight structures. I usually place a torch on the ground with the light pointing upwards. This allows me to place the conference badge holder with the specimen over the top of the torch and then my camera above it, mimicking a microscope. Moving the torch so the light is shining from the side of the specimen can also be used to highlight subtle structures like the carpophagus fossae. I use a small cube shaped torch with a white plastic diffuser over it. However, a regular torch with a piece of paper over the top should work fine. Always be careful when using a torch that you don't stun yourself by looking directly into the light (I've done that too many times!) The use of a diffused torch can be seen in this observation: https://irecord.org.uk/record-details?occurrence_id=50029157

Due to all of the wild myriapods in the UK and Ireland being tiny, a lot of magnification is needed to ID the more confusing ones. I started out with a phone clip-on macro lens. This is a small inexpensive lens (mine was roughly £10) that clips onto your phone and enhances the magnification of your phone's camera. I found this easier to use than holding up a jeweller's loupe to my phone camera because the lens holds itself in place, allowing one hand free to hold the conference badge holder. An example as to what an observation using a clip-on lens might come out like: https://irecord.org.uk/record-details?occurrence_id=41419150



Julus scandinavicus: Ventral views, showing the use of a phone clip-on macro lens and conference badge holder in irecord observation https://irecord.org.uk/record-details?occurrence_id=41419150. © Liam Keane



Geophilus electricus: Dorsal views, showing the use of torch illumination to highlight key identification characteristics as seen in the iRecord observation https://irecord.org.uk/record-details?occurrence_id=50029157. © Liam Keane

I have since upgraded to a DSLR with a camera macro lens that can reach 2:1 magnification. So far I have found the magnification, resolution and the adjustable camera settings all make taking pictures of live specimens a lot easier than using my phone. Before I had the macro lens, I used a kit lens with extension tubes which also worked quite well. Using a camera flash and diffuser has helped make things easier and gives me more flexibility with the camera settings. Investing in a small tripod might also be beneficial because holding a camera with a flash and heavy lens attached to it with one hand is quite uncomfortable (though admittedly I am still yet to buy a tripod). Other cameras that can magnify the specimen enough will most likely also work well. One of my observations using a DSLR camera: https://irecord.org.uk/record-details?occurrence_id=48442944

I have used a microscope a couple of times; however, I found this more difficult to use than a phone or camera for live specimens. Ultimately, it doesn't matter too much on what you use to take a picture, as long as it has enough magnification.

A few additional tips that can help when identifying live specimens:

- There are a few myriapods that can't be identified to species without dissection. For example, I don't think differentiating *Chordeuma* sp. or *C. britanni-*

cus and *C. latestriatus* can be done properly without dissection (though I am happy to be proven wrong).

- Myriapods can be extremely uncooperative and difficult to work with. Sometimes a lot of patience is needed when photographing them live. If a millipede or geophilomorph won't uncurl, I have found covering it with my hands for a minute or two gets it walking around.
- Become familiar with identifying features and take more pictures than you need. Even if you can't identify a live specimen in the field, having pictures of all the possible ID features lets you ID the organism at home, without having to bring the specimen home. Taking multiple pictures of the same feature increases the chance of one of them being clear and usable.
- Looking at other people's observations (or asking them how they took a photo) can help you to find ways of photographing ID features more easily. There are probably more ways to photograph live specimens that other people know about which aren't mentioned in this article. All the myriapod and isopod enthusiasts I have come across so far are always happy to help, give tips and answer questions!



Geophilus easoni (Leach, 1816) from iRecord observation https://irecord.org.uk/record-details/logged-out?occurrence_id=48442944 © Liam Keene

Woodlouse Flies - Why not rear them?

- Thomas Hughes -

Woodlouse flies, often called Rhinophorids are a sub-family of flies belonging to the Calliphoridae, which contains our very familiar pest flies including bluebottles and greenbottles. Unlike many members of this family whose larvae feed on decaying matter, the Rhinophorids are obligate endoparasitoids of woodlice. This means they require woodlice to complete their lifecycle.

An adult fly will deposit her eggs on a surface that has been contaminated with the secretion from a woodlouse - this is believed to be the sticky and stringy secretion that woodlice release from their uropods. After the eggs are placed on the surface they readily hatch into a 1st instar larva. The larva performs what can only be described as a handstand, where they wait for a passing woodlouse to latch onto. Once attached on a host they will then enter through a weakness in the woodlouse body armature, the sternal intersegmental membrane. However, this access point is still difficult to pass through and the larva must rely on attaching to a freshly moulted host to gain entry. Once inside the larva will feed on the haemolymph and organs until it reaches pupation. The pupation takes place within the host for protection and at this final stage the host will have succumbed to its parasitoid and died. The dead woodlouse will remain hidden away under bark or a log where after a short period of a week or so the fly will emerge from out of the dried carcass of its victim.

The insect world is full of bizarre and somewhat horrifying life cycles like this, but these interactions are what make natural history so fascinating to study. In this instance, Rhinophorids are often recorded as adult flies visiting flowers in spring and summer. Although these observations provide a great wealth of distribution and phenology data, they lack a crucial part of their crazy lifecycle - the host-parasitoid relationship! Arguably the most interesting aspect of their natural history, and it is invisible to most recorders.

It may seem like an impossible task trying to locate a Rhinophorid fly parasitising a woodlouse. Do I need to see the larva entering the woodlouse? Watch a fly laying eggs? See a woodlouse looking a bit unhappy? These are all possible, but very difficult to actually see in nature. After reviewing a few papers several years ago on the subject, particularly those of Bedding (1965, 1973). I was amazed that someone could examine so many hosts! In his 1965 Phd Bedding dissected 23,184

woodlice looking for Rhinophorid larvae. He was successful, to the dismay of the woodlouse, and found all the British Rhinophorid species. I was interested in trying to locate them also, but was unsure that dissecting thousands of woodlice was the way to go. I had also read from a few sources that infection rates can vary, but are often low, typically around the 2% mark or less (Wijnhoven and Zeegers 1999; Wijnhoven 2001; Wood et al. 2018; Sassaman and Garthwaite 1984, to name a few). However, this isn't as low as I had thought. If I collect 100 woodlice, I would in theory have 2 woodlouse flies to show for my efforts. After reviewing the lifecycle again, I came to the realisation that a healthy woodlouse at the right time of year could be hosting an early stage larva. If I keep 100 woodlice in captivity for a few weeks, this will allow the larva to develop, pupate, kill the host then emerge within a controlled environment. I set out to conduct the experiment, I had decided to use simple 18x18x10 cm plastic containers with top and side ventilation. The substrate was sterile coir and the hides provided were pieces of old egg boxes. This way if I put 100 woodlice in the box, the only other biological things (except the food), that would appear could only come from the woodlice themselves as everything else was sterile. This routine of keeping the woodlice moist and fed on a range of food including carrot, cucumber and fish flakes worked and after a few weeks my first flies had emerged. These were of the species *Phyto melanocephala*, a parasitoid of *Armadillidium vulgare*. I had continued the experiment over several years, trying different host species, different habitats in the effort to improve our knowledge of these flies. I have found that collecting woodlice from April-June is the most productive time and there is typically a later spike of activity at the end of the summer too. The shortest period I have encountered of fly emergence after collecting the live woodlouse was only 18 days.

Also, after becoming more familiar with the way dead woodlice look with pupae inside, I was able to start locating them in the field. Typically the woodlouse will discolour after death and the pupa can be seen as an orange glow from within the host. This is best shown in a dead *Armadillidium justii* I found on holiday in Lefkada, Greece in 2024. What makes finding them in the field so exciting is you open the door to finding hyperparasitoids too! That is where a parasitoid wasp has parasitised the pupa of the Rhinophorid fly which has parasitised the dead woodlouse. So far I have encountered this only twice. This includes a *Phygadeuon* sp. from *Porcellio scaber*, I found many of these wasps, but only at one site. The second being a *Coptera* sp. from the *Armadillidium justii* mentioned above.



I would strongly encourage others to give this simple and exciting experiment a go. It can provide great species interaction data and has limited impact on the hosts. Instead of dissecting thousands of woodlice, you can keep a smaller number over several weeks, wait to see if flies emerge, and once this has happened (or not), the remaining woodlice can be released back to the original collection site.

I would also be interested in any data from anyone wanting to have a go, particularly the number of woodlice collected, date of fly emergence and host-parasitoid identification. I would also be more than happy to discuss and answer questions. Additionally, there is an active Rhinophorid recording scheme with the Dipterists Forum being run by Ryan Mitchell (<https://dipterists.org.uk/rhinophoridae-scheme/home>) and there is a great identification resource to these flies by Steven Falk (<https://images.on-this.website/userfiles/21577/testkeyto britishblowflies132016.pdf>).

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Phyto Melanopcehala reared from *Armadillidium vulgare* © T. D. Hughes



Examples of hyperparasitoid wasps that emerged from Rhinophorid pupae within a woodlouse host. **Above**, *Phygadeuon* sp. emerged from *Porcellio scaber*, the pupa within the broken woodlouse can be seen, **Below** *Coptera* sp. emerged from the pill bug *Armadillidium justii*. © T. D. Hughes





A dead specimen of *Armadillidium justii* clearly showing the orange glow of a Rhinophorid pupa inside. © T. D. Hughes

***Oniscus asellus occidentalis*: A Conservation Cold Case**

- Annie Northfield & Thomas Hughes -

During the 2025 BMIG field meeting, we presented a lecture followed by a debate exploring whether conservation time and resources should be directed toward the common shiny woodlouse subspecies *Oniscus asellus occidentalis*. In many cases subspecies are often regarded as little more than genetic or morphological curiosities, of interest to dedicated recorders, but rarely considered a priority in mainstream conservation. This raises an important question: should they be?

Conservation becomes murky where subspecies are concerned. The concept of 'species' is fundamental in biodiversity and taxonomy, with further splits at a smaller level into 'subspecies' or, more recently, 'evolutionarily significant units'. All three have slightly varying definitions revolving around population dynamics, with subspecies defined as 'a collection of populations within a biological species that are diagnosably distinct

from other such collections of populations' (Patten & Unitt, 2002).

In this case, *O. a. occidentalis* was first described by Bilton (1994) based on ecological and morphological differences from the nominate subspecies, *O. a. asellus*. These differences include a narrower epimeron, a lighter ground colour, and subtle variation in male sexual characteristics. However, these traits occur along a continuum, ranging from individuals strongly resembling *O. a. occidentalis* through intermediates to those indistinguishable from *O. a. asellus*. Populations exhibiting the full *O. a. occidentalis* morphology have been recorded in south-western United Kingdom, southern Ireland, and north-western France, reflecting a broadly western distribution; Bilton also suggested that *O. a. occidentalis* is associated with wetter habitats in the oceanic climates of north-western Europe.

Bilton et al. (1999) ultimately considered *O. a. occidentalis* a subspecies because it does not maintain its distinctiveness in hybrid zones with *O. a. asellus*. The results of genetic analysis across populations spanning the morphological spectrum of *O. asellus* confirmed

widespread hybridisation: many populations with *occidentalis*-like traits showed genetic introgression from *O. a. asellus*. However, one population, from Wistman's Wood in Devon, appeared free of introgression. This small, isolated temperate rainforest (covering just 8.6 acres) may therefore represent a "pure" population. Notably, the genetic markers unique to *O. a. occidentalis* showed deep divergence from the nominate subspecies—at a level that, in other contexts, might justify species status.

Despite these intriguing findings, little further work has been undertaken since 1999. The difficulty of distinguishing pure from introgressed populations without genetic tools has likely contributed to this lack of progress.

This brings us to the central dilemma. Conservation funding is typically directed toward species at risk of significant decline or extinction. Why, then, focus on a subspecies of one of Britain's most common woodlice? At first glance, the case appears weak: even if *O. a. occidentalis* were lost, *O. asellus* would remain widespread. Yet this perspective highlights a broader issue in conservation: do we only protect what we deem "worthy"-charismatic species, formally recognised taxa, or organisms with obvious ecological or economic value. Less visible taxa, such as mites, micromoths and woodlice (to name but a few) rarely attract attention or funding, despite their ecological importance.

Revisiting *O. a. occidentalis*, we presented our current thinking at the BMIG meeting. With no substantial new records since Bilton et al. (1999), our hypotheses rely on existing data and the known ecology of *O. asellus*.

At present, the Wistman's Wood population is the only confirmed non-introgressed population of *O. a. occidentalis*. Its persistence may be due to isolation: the site is remote, surrounded by moorland, and effectively functions as an ecological island. Ecologically, *O. a. occidentalis* appears to favour wetter and more remote woodland habitats, whereas *O. a. asellus* occupies a broader range, including drier, synanthropic, and open environments.

The fragmented distribution of *O. a. occidentalis* and its interaction with the nominate subspecies have been described as a case of mosaic hybridisation. However, this pattern may not be entirely natural. It is plausible that *O. a. asellus* has expanded westward through human modification of the landscape, encroaching into areas once dominated by wetter habitats (particularly

temperate rainforests) historically occupied by *O. a. occidentalis*.

Temperate (or Celtic) rainforests are rare habitats found in oceanic regions. Their closed canopies, mild temperatures, and frequent rainfall create conditions that support a unique assemblage of species, including abundant epiphytic ferns, mosses, and lichens (Norman et al., 2025). Like many specialised habitats, they have been extensively reduced through human activity, leaving only small fragments scattered across their former range. These fragments are found throughout primarily south west England and Wales, and Scotland. Climate modelling suggests that up to 20% of Britain's land surface could support temperate rainforest along its western margins. If such habitat once formed a more continuous belt, it could have created a clear biogeographic division: wetter western rainforests supporting *O. a. occidentalis*, and drier eastern woodlands supporting *O. a. asellus*. Under these conditions, hybridisation may have been restricted to narrow contact zones, allowing both forms to follow distinct evolutionary trajectories.

Given the limited data available, it is reasonable to wonder whether *O. a. occidentalis* is a specialist of this habitat, and whether its current fragmented distribution reflects the historical loss of temperate rainforest. If so, increased interaction with *O. a. asellus* may be a direct consequence of habitat decline.

This scenario resembles known hybrid zones in other taxa, such as the toads *Bufo bufo* and *B. spinosus*, and the crows *Corvus corone* and *C. cornix*. In these cases, ecological differentiation contributes to reproductive isolation. It is therefore plausible that *O. a. occidentalis* represents an incipient species, with divergence driven by adaptation to distinct environmental conditions. The widespread loss of temperate rainforest may have disrupted this process, expanding hybrid zones and allowing *O. a. asellus* to predominate. If this interpretation is correct, it raises a provocative question: should *O. a. occidentalis* be elevated to species status? Its current classification as a subspecies may not reflect its evolutionary potential, but the consequences of anthropogenic habitat change.

A comparable conservation challenge can be seen in the Scottish wildcat (*Felis silvestris*). Habitat loss reduced wild populations, and subsequent habitat restoration increased contact with domestic cats, leading to widespread hybridisation. As a result, genetically "pure" wildcats are now extremely rare. This may be a similar scenario; expanding habitats such as Wistman's

Wood could inadvertently increase contact between *O. a. occidentalis* and *O. a. asellus*, promoting further hybridization and ultimately resulting in the loss of *O. a. occidentalis* entirely. This creates a difficult conservation dilemma: what, exactly, are we trying to preserve? An incipient species? A unit of distinct genetics or morphology? Or simply a symbol of past ecological conditions? If no action is taken, *O. a. occidentalis* may eventually be lost through genetic swamping. Yet the question remains whether this loss would be recognised or should be prioritised. While we are wondering whether it is justifiable to invest limited conservation resources in a common woodlouse, or if the risk of increased hybridisation is one worth taking with the expansion of habitats such as temperate rainforests, the outcomes of these questions ultimately run beyond *O. a. occidentalis*. This case highlights the complexity of conservation in human-modified landscapes and the need to consider evolutionary processes, not just species-level outcomes. While it is true that increases of a particular habitat or keystone species do promote benefits to other species (both known and unknown), it could also open up previously isolated habitats whose inhabitants, although limited in range and resources, were protected by virtue of isolation. *O. a. occidentalis* is not necessarily a unique case, simply a known one.

To address these uncertainties, we proposed that BMIG coordinate a comprehensive genetic study of *O. asellus* populations across Britain and Ireland, with particular focus on south-west England, southern Wales, and Ireland. This work would aim to quantify the extent of hybridisation, identify any remaining pure populations, and model the distribution of suitable habitat. Such ev-

idence could inform conservation decisions, including site protection and strategies to minimise further introgression.

We welcome feedback on these ideas and encourage participation from those based in south-west England or southern Wales. Contributions would involve collecting small samples (e.g. five individuals per site) for genetic analysis, particularly from temperate rainforest locations (with appropriate permissions). If you are interested, or have any further questions, please get in touch.

Finally, *The Lost Rainforests of Britain* by Guy Shrubsole provides an excellent introduction to the history, ecology, and conservation of this remarkable habitat, and is highly recommended for anyone interested in British wildlife.

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A typical example of *Oniscus asellus asellus* from east England. © A. Northfield



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NEXT NEWSLETTER - Autumn 2026

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