

THE BRITISH ISOPOD STUDY GROUP

Newsletter of the Isopod Survey Scheme

Number 28

March 1990

EDITORIAL

So much has happened since Newsletter 27 appeared in October 1989 that I have decided to bring the publication date of this Newsletter forward a couple of months. The exciting news is that no less than three species of woodlice have been discovered as New to Britain in recent months. One of these species (*Metatrichoniscoides leydigi*) is a genuine new find whereas the other two have been discovered in the same way as *Haplophthalmus montivagus*, namely by careful examination of the male genitalia of specimens in reference collections. More details of these species are given below.

1. *Metatrichoniscoides leydigi* (Weber 1880)

Steve Gregory discovered a thriving population of this species in November 1989 in the grounds of a garden centre in Oxford where he works. I have examined specimens and the male pleopods are identical to Fig. 145 in Vandel p.305. Although this species was almost certainly introduced, I believe we are justified in adding it to the British list as it is breeding well away from any glasshouses. David Bilton and I visited the garden centre last month (in torrential rain) and found several specimens of *M. leydigi* under large flowerpots which were resting on a thin layer of gravel on the soil. The pots contained young trees and when these were removed, specimens of *M. leydigi* could be seen crawling over the roots. Thus, *M. leydigi* must have been transported all over Oxford and is probably resident in many gardens where these trees have been planted.

M. leydigi is very similar in appearance to *Metatrichoniscoides celticus* being completely white and blind. The garden centre in Oxford has been in business for over 100 years so it is impossible to say when *M. leydigi* might have arrived. It is obviously worth searching for this species in other garden centres. Steve Gregory also discovered *Buddelundiella cataractae* at the same garden centre (another important find) and when David Bilton and I visited, we found a couple of specimens of this species among a layer of old peaty soil in some rubbish next to an outside toilet (good job we don't record habitat information on record cards anymore!).

The type locality of *Metatrichoniscoides* ^{leydigii} ~~ceiticius~~ is near Amsterdam and it has been introduced into Lund and Helsinki. It is sure to turn up at other sites in Britain, indeed there may already be specimens in reference collections which have been mis-identified as a species of *Trichoniscoides*, talking of which

2. *Trichoniscoides helveticus* Carl 1908

While preparing my AIDGAP key, I came to the conclusion that several species in the Family Trichoniscidae were impossible to identify with certainty without reference to the structure of the male pleopods. This is true particularly of preserved specimens which lose their colour and field characters after immersion in 70% alcohol. I therefore decided to include drawings in the key of the male pleopods of these 'difficult' species from British and/or Irish material collected by myself, or lent to me kindly by Paul Harding and Arthur Chater.

To cut a long story short, the species we have been calling *Trichoniscoides sarsi* contains two species, *Trichoniscoides sarsi* Patience 1908 and *Trichoniscoides helveticus* Carl 1908. The differences between the male pleopods of the two species are very distinct and are figured clearly in Vandell's Figs. 120 and 132 respectively. The most obvious difference is in the shape of the tip of the endopodite of the second pleopod. In *T. sarsi* it is sickle-shaped whereas in *T. helveticus* it is shaped like an elephant's trunk.

At present, the only definite sites for *Trichoniscoides sarsi* are in Ireland from the Dublin area. All other specimens of '*Trichoniscoides sarsi*' I have seen are in fact *Trichoniscoides helveticus*. I have examined definite male specimens of *Trichoniscoides helveticus* collected by Steve Sutton and Arthur Chater from Didding Hill in Sussex (which were mis-identified as *Trichoniscoides sarsi* and which appear as such on the distribution map in WIBI), Wytham Wood near Oxford, a BBONT nature reserve near Oxford and a specimen collected from a pitfall trap in a wood in Bedfordshire by Dave Guntrip. It is possible (probable?) that most other records for '*Trichoniscoides sarsi*' are really *Trichoniscoides helveticus*. This would make sense since *Trichoniscoides helveticus* is fairly widespread and well known on the continent.

The gist of all this is that all specimens of *Trichoniscoides* and *Metatrichoniscoides* need to be re-examined and new distribution maps plotted which are based on male specimens only. Therefore, I would be most grateful if all members of BISG could delve into their reference collections, dig out any specimens of these two genera and either post them to me or bring them to the Spring field meeting at Thornham. I will need to remove the pleopods from

males of these specimens but they will be mounted permanently on a slide for eventual return to collectors if requested.

I introduced this feature by saying that we have three species New to Britain. You're not going to like this, but
....

3. Two *Oniscus* in Britain!

Dave Bilton has been taking time off from studying his water beetles to take a closer look at some of our more common species. He has sent the following note;-

"*Oniscus asellus* is very common and easily recognised in the field. For these reasons it is rarely collected. Until recently I had only kept one tube of this species, these animals coming from south Devon. The specimens had caught my eye in the field, since they were somewhat narrower and paler than usual. Recently in the course of mounting the genitalia of a variety of British species I re-examined the Devon *Oniscus* and was amazed to find that on the basis of male pereopods (legs) and pleopods, they were definitely not *Oniscus asellus*! Unexpectedly, this very distinct form is not known from the continent and appears to be currently undescribed."

"I have to date looked at *Oniscus* from about a dozen other areas of England all of which represent the true *Oniscus asellus*. To get a better view of what is going on of course I need to see many more specimens! I would be grateful to receive *Oniscus* collected anywhere in the British Isles, especially in the south-west, Wales, western Scotland, and of course Ireland. If possible I would like ten to twenty specimens per locality, as males are required. Should sending specimens in alcohol be a problem, please contact me first and I can supply primed tubes. If you are going to the Thornham meeting, why not bring some *Oniscus* along?"

Dave Bilton, Department of Biology, Alderhurst, Bakeham Lane, Englefield Green, Egham, Surrey.

***ARMADILLONISCUS BILTONI* Taiti & Ferrara 1989**

Not only is Dave Bilton the first person to take a really close look at *Oniscus*, he must be the first member of BISG to have a woodlouse named after him! A recent paper by Stefano Taiti and Franco Ferrara (1989, *Tropical Zoology*, 2, 59-88) includes a description of a new species of *Armadilloniscus* collected by Dave on an expedition to Sulawesi, Indonesia in August 1987.

RECENT RECORDS

Apart from the new species described above, some significant new finds have been made since the publication of the last Newsletter. John Daws has been busy in the Liverpool area and has turned up *Porcellionides cingendus* in a garden on the Wirral and *Trichoniscoides saeroeensis* nearby on the coast (33/385 792). Several new sites for the three *Haplophthalmus* species based on male specimens have been added to the appropriate maps thanks to the efforts of John, Steve Gregory and others, and the coverage is now looking quite respectable.

ALBINO WOODLICE

Arthur Chater has sent me a superb example of an albino *Porcellio scaber* collected recently by Adrian Fowles (22/568 477). The specimen has prominent black eyes but no other pigment.

ISOPODA - VOLUME 4

Paul Harding has nearly finished his bibliography of the literature on woodlice in Britain which will comprise the whole of Volume 4 of *Isopoda*. The cover will as usual have a colour photograph, this time of *Armadillidium album*. These have been produced as postcards and like the previous cards of *Armadillidium pictum*, will be available for sale. At present, I have no material for Volume 5 so if you are considering writing an article, please let me know as soon as possible. Copies of Volume 4 should be available at the Thornham meeting. For people who can not attend, an order form will be sent to everyone on the BISG mailing list.

BISG/BMG FIELD MEETING 1990

Plans are well-advanced for this meeting to be held at Thornham Field Centre in Suffolk from 19th to 22nd April. If you wish to attend and have not yet sent your booking form to Helen Read, please do so as soon as possible but send it to me in Reading. I will then forward it to Helen since she will probably be back in Britain by the time this Newsletter is distributed.

THIRD INTERNATIONAL ISOPOD SYMPOSIUM

The proceedings of the Second Symposium held in Urbino in 1986 were published at the end of last year. The Editorial Committee are to be congratulated on getting the Symposium into print in difficult financial circumstances. It was most nostalgic watching the BBC adaptation of John Mortimer's

"Summer's Lease" on television recently. The culmination of the heroine's physical and mental journey was a visit to an art gallery in Urbino to view what she considered to be "the best small painting in the world".

The Third Symposium on the Biology of Terrestrial Isopods is to be held in Poitiers, France from 10th to 13th July 1990. Several BISG members are travelling to France for this Symposium to 'fly the flag' for British isopodology. I hope to include a report on the Symposium in the next Newsletter.

In my AIDGAP key, I have included some suggestions for common names for some of the British species. However, it appears I have been pipped at the post as the following note from Paul Harding relates. Some of these seem as likely to catch on as the poll tax!

COMMON NAMES OF BRITISH WOODLICE - AGAIN!

Just when we thought that everyone was getting used to using the scientific names for species, without worrying about the need to provide common names for the inexperienced, suddenly the government decreed that woodlice must have common names. Seymour (1989) has given names to several species of economic importance, some of which are certainly original.

<i>Androniscus dentiger</i>	cellar woodlouse
<i>Armadillidium depressum</i>	western stout pillbug
<i>Armadillidium nasatum</i>	blunt snout pillbug
<i>Armadillidium vulgare</i>	common pillbug
<i>Oniscus asellus</i>	grey garden woodlouse
<i>Philoscia muscorum</i>	hedgerow and grassland woodlouse
<i>Porcellio scaber</i>	garden woodlouse

Come back Noel, all is forgiven!

Reference

Seymour, R. (1989). Invertebrates of economic importance in Britain - common and scientific names. London: HMSO

HAIKUS

No, this isn't a new genus of isopod but the name given to a particular form of Japanese poetry. *The Guardian* ran a competition recently for 'green' haikus and published some of the entries. The poem which best illustrates the theme was by Bernadette Glynn:

Ivory dealer
I wish your teeth were larger
Then we could hunt you

However, the reason for mentioning haikus is that Chris Hames entered a poem which provides an excellent way to finish this Newsletter:

When life has most gone
from land and sea - have no doubt
The woodlouse will be

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
READING RG6 2AJ

Supplies of blank recording cards are available free from:

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

Newsletter 29 will appear in September 1990.

Newsletter 28 edited by Steve Hopkin