

# THE BRITISH ISOPOD STUDY GROUP

Newsletter of the Isopod Survey Scheme

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## EDITORIAL

There have been a number of exciting additions to the British woodlouse list in recent years, and hopefully the 1990s will see a few more! Steve Hopkin's AIDGAP key should be appearing around the end of the year, and a revised version of the Linnaean Society Synopsis should also be finished soon. Both these works will with any luck further increase the number of people with an interest in Oniscidea, and so boost the number of records received by the scheme. On taking over coordination of recording I would like to thank Steve for his enthusiastic and efficient handling over the past five years, and also everyone who will hopefully continue to keep the scheme going by sending in their records.

### Oniscus asellus agg.- latest news.

I now have a clear picture of what appears to be happening in Oniscus asellus in western Europe, and should hopefully have the two subspecies described soon. In brief the species occurs as two distinct subspecies: asellus sstr. which occurs throughout western Europe, especially in synanthropic and secondary sites, and ssp. nov. which is found in the west of England, Wales, Spain and France. Where the two subspecies meet a mosaic hybrid zone forms, where populations intermediate to the two occur. Such populations are intermediate on all characters used to distinguish the two subspecies. I still want to see O.asellus from western Britain, any ancient woodlands (especially damp ones), anywhere in Ireland or western France and Iberia. If possible a few specimens from each locality should be sent to ensure there is a male. Many thanks to all those people who have already sent material, or allowed me to examine collections in their care.

When examining the Linnaean type of O.asellus sstr. in order to redescribe it I found to my horror that this specimen is in fact a male Porcellio scaber! Many of the older isopodologists recognized this fact, and gave the name murarius to what we now know as asellus. Since the turn of the century, however current useage of asellus has become widespread; the species being one of the most familiar woodlice in the whole world fauna. For this reason I hope to be able to retain the names as they stand today, even though the types say otherwise.

## WOODLICE ON LUNDY

By Jon Daws

From 27 June to 3 July 1990 I visited Lundy Island. Lundy is a 3 x 1 mile lump of granite covered with a friable peaty soil, in the Bristol Channel about 20 miles west of Ilfracombe. The island rises to a plateau of 400 feet, with the west side blasted by the Atlantic, and the East side more sheltered with a little planted scrubby woodland. There is a population of about 17 people and a working farm.

A National Trust survey team had recorded nine species of woodlouse in May 1986. These included most of the commonest species plus Ligia oceanica and Porcellionides cingendus.

During my stay I walked round the island a couple of times, but tended to concentrate my collecting on several favoured places. Due to the very steep sides of the island access to the shore-line was extremely limited. The landing beach provided the easiest place to search amongst strandline debris and large boulders. This yielded the usual Ligia oceanica as well as several Trichoniscoides saeroeensis and a single female Halophiloscia couchi.

Below the main village is a small vegetable garden with a ditch running through it. This damp habitat proved quite productive, with Androniscus dentiger, Haplophthalamus mengei, Trichoniscus pusillus and Trichoniscus pygmaeus being found under stones. Manure from the farm had been dumped in a corner of the walled garden. This produced a single Porcellio dilatatus.

With the manure in mind the farm was my next stop. Under pieces of wood lying around the farmyard hundreds of Armadillidium depressum were found together with one or two Armadillidium vulgare. These two species have interesting distributions on the island, with A.vulgare common round the whole of Lundy, whereas A.depressum is restricted to the farm area and mortared walls around the village. The farm area also yielded several more specimens of P.dilatatus.

On the penultimate day of my visit I walked out to the northern tip of the island, and whilst resting next to the north lighthouse pulled up several clumps of peaty soil to reveal two small white specimens of Miktoniscus patiencei.

During my last day on Lundy I visited the old graveyard just west of the village. About half of the twenty or so headstones had fallen over. These were turned to reveal more P.cingendus along with my sixteenth species for the island, a single yellowish Philoscia muscorum.

On receiving records Steve Hopkin commented that Cylisticus convexus was probably somewhere on the island – I promised to look harder in future!

## BISG Meeting 1991

This was based on the Isle of Purbeck, and gave rise to a number of interesting records, which are summarized in the following table. Most noteworthy are the records of Trichoniscoides albidus, which have made quite an impact on the distribution map. This species is probably very widespread in coastal, riverine and synanthropic habitats throughout the south of Britain at least. It usually seems to occur in very wet sites, particularly on heavy clays. True Haplophthalamus mengei also turned up, inland as well as on the coast itself. Next year the meeting is likely to be in the Forest of Dean – more details in the Autumn newsletter.

SPECIES  
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 LOCALITY

LOCALITY	Reference	<i>Androniscus dentiger</i>	<i>Armadillidium depressum</i>	<i>Armadillidium vulgare</i>	<i>Cylisticus convexus</i>	<i>Halophiloscia couchi</i>	<i>Haplophthalamus danicus</i>	<i>Haplophthalamus mengei</i> sstr.	<i>Ligia oceanica</i>	<i>Miktoniscus paciencii</i>	<i>Oniscus asellus</i> agg.	<i>Oniscus asellus intermediates</i>	<i>Oniscus asellus</i> ssp. nov.	<i>Philoscia muscorum</i>	<i>Platyrhynchus hoffmannseggii</i>	<i>Porcellio laevis</i>	<i>Porcellio scaber</i>	<i>Porcellio spinicornis</i>	<i>Porcellionides cingendus</i>	<i>Trichoniscoides albidus</i>	<i>Trichoniscus pusillus</i> agg.	<i>Trichoniscus pygmaeus</i>
Lulworth Cove	30/824798	•	•	•								•										
Great Wood	30/910819						•			•			•			•				•	•	
Burngate Wood	30/832827									•			•			•						
East Stoke Fen	30/864865			•			•			•			•			•				•	•	
Stoke Mill	30/871867									•			•			•				•	•	
Roadside B3069	30/978789			•						•			•			•				•	•	
The Plantation	30/953794			•						•			•			•				•	•	
Corfe Common	30/962809									•			•			•				•	•	
Rempstone Wood	30/995818						•			•			•			•				•	•	
Nine Barrow Down	40/006815									•			•			•				•	•	
Studland	40/030821					•				•			•			•				•	•	
Gravel Point	40/033863									•			•			•				•	•	
South Haven Point	40/036866			•						•			•			•				•	•	
Shell Bay	40/036866									•			•			•				•	•	
Leeson House	40/004786	•	•	•						•			•	•		•				•	•	•
Linford	41/180673									•			•			•				•	•	
Durleston Bay	30/034780	•	•	•		•		•		•			•	•		•				•	•	
Arne	30/981883			•				•		•			•			•				•	•	
Chapman's Pool	30/954770			•				•		•			•	•		•				•	•	
Furzebrook	30/933835			•		•				•			•	•		•				•	•	
New Swanage	40/03-80-	•	•	•	•	•	•	•		•			•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Durleston Head	30/035773		•	•						•			•	•		•				•	•	
Eyepes Mouth	SY/436912			•				•		•			•	•		•				•	•	
Chesil Beach	SY/567841			•						•			•	•		•				•	•	
Ware Cliffs	SY/330913	•		•						•			•	•		•				•	•	
Luscombe Valley	40/047895									•			•			•				•	•	
Canford Heath	40/018967									•			•			•				•	•	
Slope Farm	30/959859									•			•	•		•				•	•	
Hartland Moor	30/955855			•						•			•			•				•	•	
Stock Wood	31/730133									•			•			•				•	•	
Deadmoor Common	31/756110									•			•			•				•	•	
Little Mintern	31/672045									•			•			•				•	•	
Melcombe Park	31/713047									•			•			•				•	•	
Holt Forest	41/03-05-									•			•			•				•	•	
Bere Wood	30/87-94-									•			•			•				•	•	
Dean Hill	40/01-81-									•			•	•		•				•	•	

**Table showing species recorded during the BISG meeting in Dorset April 1991.**

## Isopod water balance

Jonathan Wright is currently reworking this topic on a number of species. He has found that woodlice can actively absorb water from unsaturated air (93% humidity) through their pleopods. Jonathan also notes that the species examined are at least an order of magnitude more waterproof than previous work has suggested, although terrestrial isopods still lose water far more rapidly than insects or arachnids. Work so far has been published in Wright, J. C. & Machin, J. 1990. Water vapour absorption on Terrestrial Isopods. Journal of Experimental Biology **154** 13–30. Jonathan is keen to look at other species, but there is a very limited choice of material in northern Canada where he is currently based. If anyone can get the following species in numbers he'd be keen to receive live specimens. These are best sent in a plastic container packed with moss to control humidity. A few air holes should be made in the top. How damp to make the environment depends on the species concerned. Most species do not want to be too moist, but Trichoniscids should be kept fairly damp, and Ligidium may even need some free water.

### Species wanted:

Ligidium hypnorum, any Trichoniscidae **except** Trichoniscus pusillus, Androniscus dentiger and Haplophthalamus spp., Halophiloscia couchi, Armadillidium album, depressum, pictum and pulchellum.

Send to: Dr. J. C. Wright, Dept of Zoology, University of Toronto, TORONTO, Canada M5S 1A1.

## Stenophiloscia

During the course of preparing the AIDGAP key Steve Hopkin has redrawn Stenophiloscia zosteræ from British material. He informs me that the figure in Woodlice in Britain and Ireland is very misleading, since it gives the impression of a spiny squat animal which would presumably be slow-moving. In fact Stenophiloscia is rather smooth, and resembles a small Halophiloscia couchi, and would probably be passed over as such in the field. It would be worth keeping such woodlice from sites on the south and south-east coasts, especially from sandy shingle. Who knows 1991 may be the year for the rediscovery of S.zosteræ in Britain.

## RECORDS, CORRESPONDENCE, ARTICLES FOR NEXT NEWSLETTER ETC. TO.....

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### Record cards from.....

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