

OPILIONES (HARVEST-SPIDER) RECORDING SCHEME

Newsletter No. 10 - June 1991

Sp.nov. Following the announcement in the last Newsletter (July 1990) of the finding of a species of *Centetostoma* new to Britain I am delighted to report from Peter Smithers of Plymouth that males have now been found, and that Paul Hillyard of the Natural History Museum considers the species to be new to science. I understand that he will describe it as such under the name of *C. britannicum* sp.nov. The British population appears to be very localised in three sites within a 4.8 (3 miles) radius. All sites are of a disturbed nature - an old railway line cutting now used as a local rubbish dump (I wonder how long for, and if old garden/horticultural refuse is put there), a disused quarry recently used as a light industrial depot, and the moat of an abandoned anti-Napoleonic fort, the slopes of which are now covered with mixed deciduous woodland. The surrounding areas have been intensively searched without result. Peter suggests that this species might have been introduced relatively recently, and that it may have a preference for more open places as suggested by the length of legs. Perhaps I may add a point here; the related *Mitostoma chrysomelas* also with relatively long legs and as far as I can judge of similar form and habits, has a remarkable ability to fold up its limbs including the pedipalps! The table which Peter has compiled shows the monthly distribution and numbers of *Centetostoma* at each site. The figures for the railway cutting are September = 32, October = 28, December = 2, April = 1 thus indicating the usual season for maximum numbers of most harvestmen. The figures for the other two sites are: quarry, October = 2, February = 4 and the old fort October = 3: these are a little low but possibly indicative. We look forward to hearing more about this new species and urge anyone visiting Northern Spain and South-West France to keep a look out for *Centetostoma* species and send them to Paul at the NHM. It is from this part of Europe that our species may have come and be awaiting discovery there.

Sabacon A very useful paper on the ecology of our sub-species by Ian Morgan (Countryside Council for Wales, Carmarthen) appeared in the Dyfed Invertebrate Group Newsletter, 19 (December 1990). Everyone in the West (and East) should read this thoughtful and thought-provoking paper. The author is right in suggesting the desirability of humidity and temperature preference analysis for *Sabacon*, especially in view of a record recently sent to me where this species was found in an open, non-wooded wet/poor fen area quite unlike any habitat previously recorded for this species. Indeed it would be interesting to see such analyses for all British species in all instars! (See Valerie Todd's paper. *Journal of animal Ecology* 18, (2) 209 - 1949). Could it be that *Sabacon*, as a relatively sheltered ground-living species, like *Trogulus*, *Anelasmacephalus* and the Nemastomatidae, has a more extended breeding period than most harvestmen, resulting in young in different stages occurring in many months of the year?

Where did they come from? Until we know more about their distribution and ecological requirements and tolerances, the question of where *Centetostoma*, *Sabacon* and *Dicranopalpus* originated and whether they are introductions to Britain or are relict species of late post-glacial invaders, must remain speculative.

L. ehippiatus and *O. tridens* Jürgen Gruber of the Natural History Museum of Vienna has kindly drawn attention to another character which helps to separate the adult males of these two species. The movable limb of the chelicera in

Lacinius has a small retrolateral (backwardly directed and on the side) tooth which is absent in *Oligolophus tridens*. He makes the interesting suggestion that during copulation the male inserts his chelicerae, held parallel together, between those of the female, pushing them aside.

The Atlas Brian Eversham hopes that it will be possible to produce an updated version of the Atlas in the near future. To this end, would all recorders please make a big effort to send in as many records as possible by October 31st 1991 - have a good spring and autumn turn out with those records and get them onto cards. We still have to use the old names, but the sooner we use up this lot the sooner we can bring the nomenclature up to date and add the recently discovered species.

An unusual record John Dawes has sent in a most unusual record for *Opilio parietinus* "On front step of pub early in the morning. Car park is cobbled". I wonder if John was cobbled too! But joking apart, this species has a tendency to be synanthropic and not infrequently can be found in toilets at pubs where it can obtain moisture.

A weekend course on Harvestmen is scheduled for Friday - Sunday 6 - 8 September 1991, at the Juniper Hall Field Centre, Mickleham, Dorking, Surrey, RH5 6DA. This course is for beginners as well as those with experience in this group. Identification, general biology, literature etc. will be included. For details please write or 'phone the Warden (0306 883849). I hope to welcome some recorders there and to have Paul Hillyard with us too.

A useful book Peter Vincent (University of Lancaster) has published a book which includes the why and the wherefore of recording schemes (especially in chapter 3 *inter alia*) which should be useful to those who have recently joined, or are about to join, any recording scheme. The title is *The Biogeography of the British Isles - an Introduction*; Routledge, 1990.

Thanks to everyone for the splendid support for our recording scheme and also, as annually, to Paul Harding and Brian Eversham at Monks Wood who deal in things other than harvest-spiders!

Record cards and instructions, free of charge, are available from:

Brian Eversham
The Environmental Information Centre
Monks Wood Experimental Station
Abbots Ripton
HUNTINGDON
Cams PE17 2LS

and my address, if you want help with identification (please remember former requests for decent smelling specimens, only a few in each tube, and full data - not written in pencil, and return postage, please) is:

John Sankey
3 Glenrose
Old London Road
Mickleham
Dorking
Surrey RH5 6BY
(Tel: 0306 883205)