

## OPILIONES (HARVEST-SPIDER) RECORDING SCHEME

Newsletter No. 11 - June 1992

The saga of *Centetostoma* continues. Peter Smithers from Plymouth writes: 'Despite intensive searching of the area no further colonies have been discovered. Therefore the origin of *Centetostoma* in south Devon still remains a mystery. However there may be a link with English China Clays, as all of the sites are in close proximity to one of their works. It also transpires that ECC transport rock from northern Spain to their depot at St. Austell in Cornwall, and from there to Devon. So it is possible that they have been introduced in this way. This is however a tentative hypothesis which needs a few hard facts to substantiate it. If anyone finds themselves in the St. Austell area this autumn, please keep a weathered eye for our Spanish Interloper!' From the Natural History Museum Paul Hillyard says: 'The status (species/subspecies/variety) of *Centetostoma* sp. recently discovered in Devon (see Newsletters 9 and 10) needs further consideration. Comparing its genitalia with the nearest relative - *C. bacilliferum* (Simon) from Northern Spain, it does appear to be a distinct species. But specimens collected by Richard Abbott (Manchester University) from Bordeaux have presented intermediate forms - the old problem among harvestmen! It is hoped that Prof. Jochen Martens will make the necessary judgement! So any specimens of this genus found in Britain or Western Europe would be welcomed at the Natural History Museum'.

Craig Slawson from Staffordshire makes some useful comment on the distribution and identification of *Nelima gothica*: 'Considering how few records there were for *N. gothica* in the 1988 Provisional Atlas, it has surprised me how common and widespread this species is in Staffordshire, even though the first county record was as recent as 1984 and all subsequent records have been since 1988. Most of the records have been from deciduous woodland, even as early as May. I have found *Nelima* is distinct enough although still immature. A field character I find almost unmistakable is the pale leg joints, giving *Nelima* the appearance of white 'knees'; this is more striking than the pale trochanters (the toothed palpal claw and spined ocularium confirmed under the microscope). I have so far found this character consistent, although not mentioned in either of the Synopses'. Recorders - would you care to comment? Thank you Craig. He continues: 'Another character of *Nelima* I cannot find in the literature is an apparent communal behaviour. This July I beat over fifty individuals from a 10 metre stretch of overhanging tussocks in Castern Wood (SK15), Staffs, anything up to ten harvestmen from one tussock. Last June in the same locality a defunct spider's web (c20 cm across) was found inhabited by over twenty individuals and still in Castern Wood, but in grassland this July I found twelve individuals crowded under an angled fence post avoiding the sun, but otherwise reasonably exposed. Communal behaviour has been described for other Leiobuninae (Hillyard & Sankey, 1989, p.19) but I would be interested to hear anyone else's observations on this subject'.

My own recollections are that young *Leiobunum blackwalli* may have white 'knees' but its eyes give it away even in the tiny individuals. I have difficulty with immature Leiobunids and it would be useful to review the characters of the three species (can someone breed them to different instars and describe them?). The spicules on the ocularium of *Nelima*, in the mature ones, can be difficult to detect and if my memory

serves me right they are present in young *I. blackwalli*. I think fresh specimens should be examined for these characters.

Kevin Hughes from Boldre, Hants, notes that '*Dicranopalpus ramosus* is widespread in the gardens, occurring in all the low vegetation around the house. Most specimens have been discovered in evergreen shrubs eg holly and ivy clad trunks. Away from the gardens holly and ivy seems to provide the most profitable sites to search'. I found this species commonly on mature hawthorn shrubs (no evergreens present) near the Devils Dyke at the back of Brighton in Sussex a few years ago, and also in mixed shrubs - with much hawthorn - near Winchester (Hants.) where it was present in large numbers several falling into the tray at each beat. Any comments on the ecology of this species?

John Daws provides an unusual record for *Leiobunum rotundum* '... running around on chest of young lady resting in a deck chair. A harvestman I had to collect'.

Monks Wood will accept Gen 7 record cards but they do not always give enough information for checking. The RA 27 cards are preferable. Where a record or records are sent in of a species or more than one species collected or identified by others please give your name and code number; use the 'other species' box at the foot of the card to give fuller details of the originator of the record, the person responsible for the identification, and the person completing the card if these differ.

We in South East England are desiccated (written 24.5.92) and I anticipate even more difficulty in finding harvestmen this season than ever before; has anyone done any systematic counts in the same habitat over the last few years? Last autumn I awaited Dennis Owen's usual spate of *Odiellus spinosus* from pitfall traps at Leicester; he wrote to me 'We have abandoned pitfall trapping at Leicester as the returns had become so small and we wanted to expand other types of monitoring ...'.

We look forward to the appearance of the second edition of the Provisional Atlas in the near future. This has only been made possible by the diligence of all the recorders - thank you one and all. Keep up the good work and do make a point of looking out for *Sabacon* and *Centetostoma* especially in the South West and in South Wales. And as always our grateful thanks for the support from Paul Harding and Brian Eversham at the Environmental Information Centre (ITE Monks Wood, Abbots Ripton, Huntingdon PE17 2LS) from whom record cards and instructions (no charge) may be obtained.

My address is 3 Glenrose, Old London Road, Mickleham, Dorking, Surrey RH5 6BY (0306 883205) and I am available to help whenever possible so long as I can keep my palps moist!