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## OPILIONES (HARVEST-SPIDER) RECORDING SCHEME

Newsletter No. 13 - July 1994

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Apart from certain young stages of harvest spiders which are not easy to identify, especially when very small, most of the adults seem to give little trouble except *Paroligolophus meadii* (Pickard-Cambridge). Over the past few years I have had a number of enquiries about this species, which appears to be very local in its distribution and virtually confined to England and Wales (Sankey, J.H.P., 1988, *Provisional Atlas of the Harvest-spiders (Arachnida: Opiliones) of the British Isles*. Huntingdon: Biological Records Centre). As far as I can judge, all records are from relatively dry and well drained soils; for example, there is a small colony on the south facing chalk grassland scarp at Box Hill, Surrey, and I knew a colony (very numerous) on the sand dunes at West Wittering, West Sussex in 1959. Tests with twelve specimens from the latter after being kept on dry sand for several days indicated that individuals could survive in a relative humidity of  $55\% \pm 5\%$ . I have only once found *P. meadii* under heather *Erica cinerea*; this was a mature female on 12 March 1956 and near Thursley in West Surrey. This specimen was kept for thirteen days without producing eggs; it may have been a survivor from the previous season. A batch of eggs from a female taken on Headley Heath, Surrey, in October 1951, began to hatch on 28 February 1952 after being kept indoors. Each egg was white with a shiny surface, round, and 0.5 mm in diameter; as development proceeded the colour became yellowish-green and the eyes became visible as two dark brown spots at one pole - a usual feature in all opilionid eggs which I have seen develop. At eclosion, the first instar skin remained in or near the empty egg; the second instar pullus was a dirty grey colour with shiny black eyes; there was a single very prominent and thin forwardly directed spine without traces of side spines representing the trident. The ocularium spines were thick and short; the armature on the palps and legs was much as in the adults but proportionally smaller. There were no transverse rows of characteristic tubercles on the dorsal surface of the abdomen, a feature so typical of the adult and somewhat reminiscent, under a good lens, of a miniature well kept military cemetery! None of these young survived for long. Adults taken on Box Hill, Surrey, 20 August 1993 (two females and four males) together with odd specimens in previous years shows *P. meadii* adults to be variable in colour; the saddle is usually quite well defined against a sandy background, the males usually being darker than the females. There appears to be a notable contrast with the darker limbs and lighter abdominal background, as the penultimate instar becomes adult, especially in females, which are larger than the males.

Other features of this species are its marked smallness which, being a ground living creature, makes it the more difficult to find; it is very active and disappears rapidly between the bases of plants when disturbed. When resting, the legs, especially the exceptionally long second pair (up to about 15 mm), are held well out laterally from the body, just as in *Dicranopalpus ramosus*. One pair of my 1993 specimens mated, but no eggs were produced; the last specimen - a male - died on 5 December. The adult males have a characteristic penis (Hillyard, P. and Sankey, J.H.P., 1989, *Synopsis of the British Fauna no. 4*, p. 68/9 (incidentally omitted from the index)) so there should be no problem identifying adult males.

*Oligolophus hansenii* (Kraepelin) might be the second most difficult of our harvest spiders to identify. If so, please let me know and I will see what can be done; any tips you may have with identities can always be passed on via this newsletter; again with *O. hansenii*, the male has a characteristic penis.

An interesting article by G. Craig Slawson on the use of computers in biological recording highlights their value in storage and retrieval of record data. My job is to check records as far as I am able. The inclusion of habitat data is often a useful factor in the determination of a specimen. Records from personal computers are acceptable to the BRC, and I hope may always include habitat data. Brian Eversham adds the following comments:

Those of you who also record spiders, or are members of the British Arachnological Society, may have seen recent articles discussing the use of computers in arachnid recording. Stan Dobson, of the BAS, has produced a computer programme called SPIREC for spider recorders, and has now written a similar one, OPIREC, for harvestman recording. Details of these programmes will appear in future issues of the Spider Recording Scheme Newsletter: write to me at Monks Wood if you would like a copy and are not on the regular mailing list. In general, BRC is able to receive records on computer disk from any database which can output in ASCII format. If in doubt, please contact BRC before sending data. Most important, before records are sent to BRC, it is vital that they have been scrutinised by John Sankey - please send a paper copy of your records to John for checking, and make any resulting amendments, before passing data to BRC (either on disk or on paper).

I regret that a second edition of the *Provisional Atlas of the Harvest-spiders* has still not appeared. This is partly due to continuing pressures of research work using the BRC databases, and partly a reflection of the effectiveness of the recording scheme: processing the many hundreds of additional records received since the 1988 *Atlas* is a bigger task than expected. Please do not be disheartened by the delay, and keep sending in your records: when the *Atlas* finally appears, it will be even more complete.

Again, our thanks to Paul Harding and Brian Eversham for continued interest and help with harvest spiders, their address is:

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PE17 2LS** (from which record cards are available, free of charge)

and mine is

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John Sankey