

## OPILIONES (HARVEST-SPIDER) RECORDING SCHEME

Newsletter No 3 - April 1984

### IDENTIFICATION SERVICE

Since the last Newsletter (April 1983) I have identified some two thousand specimens for recorders. I am happy to continue to do so, but it would make the task quicker and easier if recorders would please not put 30 or even 10 specimens in the same tube! Fortunately most harvestmen can be recognised by the chassis alone, and equally fortunately the palps - often an essential part for correct identification - usually remain attached, but the legs don't! Specimens from pitfall traps are perhaps a problem, and it is best if the traps can be emptied frequently and the harvestmen put into 70% alcohol immediately. Very young individuals are sometimes difficult or indeed impossible to identify if they are badly mutilated. For recording purposes it is best to try for species when they are known to be mature.

The PO will do their best to ensure that I receive a soggy alcoholic-smelling mess of broken tubes and bits of harvestmen, so please pack specimens to me with the greatest care. Edding Profipens (I use 0.1 diameter) are very good for water- or spirit-proof labelling. Return postage would be much appreciated.

Paul Hillyard of the Arachnida Department, British Museum (Natural History) and I are preparing to revise the Linn. Soc. Synopsis no. 4 (New Series). We are conscious of many improvements which could be made. Suggestions are welcome and should be sent to me; if a reply is needed an SAE must be enclosed - I'm retired!

### COLLECTING TECHNIQUES

Ground-living species like the two Trogulids, Nemastomids, Homalenotus and Sabacon (now discovered near Cardiff) need a careful search. I gather a good sackful of likely leaf litter and other plant material including the more open types of moss with just a scraping of the loose top soil, take it home and sieve it onto a white plastic sheet with a strong electric light (150 watts) suspended above. I find that the material is best gathered when not very wet (eg not immediately after heavy rain), and if a poly-bag like a dustbin liner is used the material should be examined as quickly as possible as litter tends to sweat in the polythene and kill the invertebrates. An ordinary garden sieve, about nine holes to the square inch, is ideal. Don't sieve too much at a time and spread out the material coming through so that it does not form a thick layer. Be patient and if after a few minutes you see a piece of earth get up and walk away you will have found a Trogulid!

## PROGRESS OF SCHEME

I have kept an up-to-date map of 10 km squares from which records have come my way. It looks impressive, except for the whole of Ireland and a few smaller areas notably in the Midlands, East Anglia and parts of Wales and Scotland. But it is obvious that some species hitherto unrecorded must occur in many of those squares, especially the ground-living ones which appear to be associated more with basic soils such as on Chalk, Carboniferous Limestone and various calcareous sandstones of the Corallian and Great Oolite of the Jurassic. Incidentally whilst collecting ground-living harvestmen you might keep woodlice, millipedes, centipedes, molluscs, etc for the recording schemes! There are Biological Records Centre schemes for all these groups - details are available from BRC.

Many thanks to all of you who have sent specimens and records. Do look out for Sabacon in South Wales; also for Dicranopalpus which is clearly more widespread than we thought. Doug Brown believes it is associated with old gardens and exotic trees such as Holm Oak and perhaps with plant debris, in which it may be distributed in the egg stage. So comb through the muck at the side of lay-bys and in all places where you wouldn't normally search for harvestmen; but don't forget sand dunes, especially the more calcareous and vegetation-rich unleached ones. Mitopus ericaeus should be looked for too; I suggest any large and well coloured Mitopus should be collected from over about 600 m and perhaps from lower altitudes as one proceeds northwards from the Scottish border. Good hunting, let's have lots of exciting new records!

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