

OPILIONES (HARVEST-SPIDER) RECORDING SCHEME

Newsletter No. 6 - July 1987

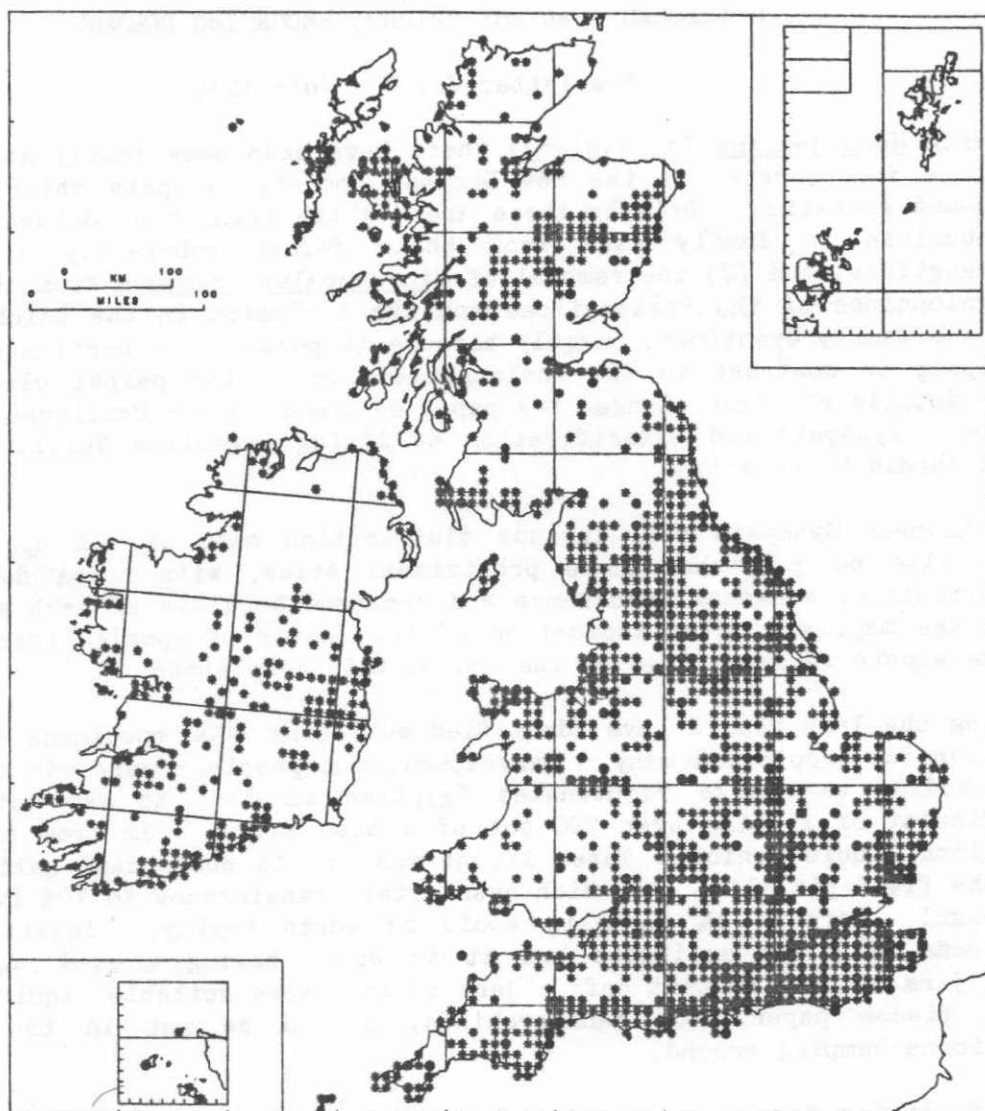
As with Homo sapiens (=insapiens) there have been some family changes! These will be incorporated in the new Linnean Society Synopsis which is still in advanced gestation. Briefly these are (1) the raising of Sclerosomatinae and Leiobuninae to family rank from their former sub-family status in the Phalangiidae, and (2) the removal of Dicranopalpus ramosus from the sub-family Oligolophinae of the Phalangiidae and its inclusion in the Leiobunidae under the sub-family Gyantinae, largely because it possesses a pectinate claw on the pedipalp in contrast to the Phalangiidae, where the palpal claw is smooth. For details of these changes the paper by Shear, W A - Opiliones in Parker, S P (ed.) Synopsis and Classification of living Organisms Vol.2. McGraw Hill, 1982 should be consulted.

The Linnean Synopsis will include distribution maps of all species. These will also be published as a provisional Atlas, with notes describing the distribution, seasonal occurrence and recorded habitats of each species. The coverage map, giving an indication of the number of species recorded in each 10 km square is reproduced at the end of this newsletter.

During the last year I have identified well over 4000 specimens of harvestmen for various people and many - harvestmen, not people - were without limbs and the bodies were like rejuvenated Egyptian mummies, to say nothing of the difficulty of fishing over 200 out of a tube 2.5 x 7 cm from the most vile smelling liquid, which I later learnt was due to commercial anti-freeze used in the field pitfalls, and which even after transference to 70% IMS still came through! Perhaps 4% formalin would be worth trying. Inevitably pitfall proceeds will get mutilated but it is worth trying to put them in cheap poly-jars or even instant coffee jars if they have suitable liquid-tight lids; some tissue paper, not handkerchiefs, should be put in to prevent the specimens bumping around.

The following from Steve Hopkin of the University of Reading is of interest: 'Every year in an attempt to keep down the slug population in our garden my wife puts out six old yoghurt pots half filled with brown ale in the same manner as pitfall traps. The slugs are attracted to these, fall in and drown, and give our seedlings some respite from their rasping radulae. Since moving to Reading a couple of years ago I have noticed that as well as slugs, we also get huge numbers of the large harvestman Odiellus spinosus trapped in the pots. Our garden is only 10 metres by 10 metres but when we emptied the pots last week for the first time (1986), I counted 154 individuals which had drowned during one night. Venturing out subsequently, after dark with a torch, I counted dozens of Odiellus crawling over the surface of the soil and the surrounding wall of the garden so the mass slaughter of the previous week does not seem to have drastically affected the population. Odiellus spinosus is by far the most numerous carnivorous invertebrate in urban Reading although why it should be so common is a mystery.'

I have received numbers of the same species in pitfall proceeds from Denis Owen of Oxford Polytechnic which were taken in his garden in Leicester and Oxford - also small gardens. His score for Leicester (April to October inclusive) is 31 in 1980, 31 in 1981, 12 in 1982, 31 in 1983, 18 in 1984, 49 in 1985, 55 in 1986 and at Oxford in 1986 for the whole year a total of 182 were recorded. This species is a heat lover and its most northerly record in Britain is from Lincolnshire. It is fairly common in the South of France, two shared our bedroom for a fortnight near Vernet-les-Bains on a holiday a few years ago! Has anyone other large scores and comments please? Let's hear from a few Recorders - this is your Newsletter. Good recording for 1987.



- * = 1-7 species recorded
- = 8-14 species recorded
- = 15 or more species recorded

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Stop Press:

Mike Chinery has sent two beautiful Gyas titanus Simon, the largest European harvestman, from N. Spain; it also occurs in other mountainous areas. If you're having a holiday abroad this year why not take a tube or two of preservative and help swell the European records. If you can't name them I'll pass them on to Jochen Martens if necessary.