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RECENT RECORDS OF THALASSISOBATES LITTORALIS (SILVESTRI)

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The halophile species, Thalassiosobates littoralis Silvestri, is among the rarer British Millipedes. Blower (1972, 1974) records it from three vice-counties - Westmorland/North Lancashire (VC.69), Bagnall (1917); Caernarvon (VC.49), Eason (1957); and the Isle of Man (VC.71), Blower (1963). This north-western occurrence in Britain noticed by Blower (1972) is not supported by recent records of this species from South Devon (VC. 3) and East Norfolk (VC.27).

Six specimens of T. littoralis were collected from the seaward side of the shingle ridge at Slapton, Devon (20/8243) during the period 27-29 June 1977, using pitfall traps. The millipedes occurred in a 10 metres deep zone of the beach from just below the sparsely vegetated seaward edge of the ridge crest, through a belt of storm drift lines, onto a fairly horizontal shelf. They did not occur in traps above this zone (15 metres) or below it, to the high tide edge (25 metres).

The shingle ridge and its form and constituents are described by Mercer (1966). At the time of my visit in June 1977, the area in which T. littoralis occurred had a surface of fairly fine shingle and some areas of sand. Oval slabs of slate and silt-stone were common in the area, lying on the surface of the fine shingle.

Subsequently I have learned from Dr. M.J. Cotton that T. littoralis occurred in pitfall traps placed in the same area of the Slapton shingle ridge, in 1974. Mr. W.A. Ely (pers. comm.) has identified material of this species in the Leicestershire Museum, which was collected at Blakeney Point, Norfolk in 1972. Pitfall trapping on the beach at Scolt Head Island, Norfolk in July and September 1977 failed to reveal its occurrence there.

More recently R.E. Jones and P. Pratley (pers. comm.) collected three specimens from the Garrison, St. Mary's, Isles of Scilly, in company with the centipedes Strigamia maritima and Schendyla nemorensis in a soil-filled crack in a low granite sea cliff. The crack was situated above the zone of black lichen, but still within the splash zone.

From these widely spaced occurrences, it seems possible that the rarity of T. littoralis may be more apparent than real. The habitats in which it occurs are difficult to work, although the somewhat improbable technique of pitfall trapping in shingle has been successful twice at Slapton.

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