Bulletin of the British Myriapod Group 5 (1988)

MISCELLANEA

Scolopendra subspinipes subspinipes Leach in a cargo of bananas.

Mr. D.R. Bird, Curator of the Natural World, Poole, recently sent me a scolopendromorph centipede 80 mm long which he had been sent from a pathology laboratory in a Boscombe (Dorset) Hospital. The specimen proved to be a Scolopendra subspinipes subspinipes.

Attems (1930) gives its distribution as: all tropical and subtropical countries with the exception of the Mediterranean region, especially in the Indo-Australian region: one of the commonest scolopendromorphs. It does not, in fact, occur naturally on the African mainland and appears to be S.E. Asian in origin. Scolopendra subspinipes subspinipes seems to be a wandering species, it sometimes climbs up into long houses in Sarawak (Lewis, unpublished data) and it may climb trees. Such behaviour favours distribution through trading: it may be collected with fruit or climb into packing cases. This specimen was in a case of bananas from Jamaica.

References:

Attems, G. 1930. Das Tierreich 54. Walter de Gruyter and Co. Berlin and Leipzig

J.G.E. Lewis - Taunton School, Taunton, Somerset.

Abnormal coxopleural teeth in Lithobius forficatus L.

On May 26 1987 a female Lithobius forficatus was collected from beneath a stone by a walled track at Croydon Hill, near Timberscombe, Somerset. Grid reference 966415, altitude 180 m. The track was lined on one side by beech trees, on the other by pine wood.

The specimen shows an abnormal condition of the left prehensorial tooth plate (Fig. 1) the anterior border of which is concave rather than straight, the three central teeth being very much reduced in size. The specimen shows no evidence of injury and it seems possible that the abnormality may be a developmental one, the growth of the central region of the anterior border of the tooth plate having been inhibited during development.

Lewis (1987) described an abnormal specimen of Lithobius borealis Meinert from Lydeard Hill in Somerset in which the tooth plate was atypical. This, he suggested was a developmental abnormality. Matic (1958) pointed out that developmental differences may be the kinds of differences that are used to separate species.

References:

Lewis, J.G.E. (1987) On some structural abnormalities in Lithobius and Cryptops (Chilopoda) and their possible significance. Bulletin of the British Myriapod Group 4: 3-6

Matic, Z. (1958) Doua Lithobiidae noi pentru fauna R.P.R. si interesante unele observatii la Lithobius forficatus. Studii Ceretari Biol., Clui, 9: 81-89.

J.G.E.Lewis

Additional moult in Lithobius variegatus Leach

Lithobius variegatus breeds when showing 6.5.5.5 or 7.6.6.6 coxal pores (Eason 1964). These stadia were termed maturus and post maturus by Lewis (1965). Eason and Serra (1986) state that the coxal pores are never more than 7.6.6.6 in England but specimens from Co. Mayo on the west coast of Ireland 24 to 30 mm long have numbers ranging from 7.6.6.5 to 8.7.7.6. In Iberian specimens the number can reach 10.9.9.9 suggesting further post-larval stadia in addition to those found in British specimens.

On 4th February 1986 a female Lithobius variegatus was taken under a stone in a quarry in open mixed larch-ash wood 0.2 km east of Hestercombe House near West Monkton, Somerset. Grid Ref: 244288, altitude 90 m. This specimen had 8.7.7.6 pores on the left and 4.7.7.6 on the right and had presumably undergone

an additional moult, it may be that more specimens of this stadium will be found in Devon and Cornwall.

References:

Eason, E.H. 1964. Centipedes of the British Isles. London: Warne.
Eason, E.H. and Serra, A. 1986. On the geographical distribution of Lithobius variegatus Leach, 1814 and the identity of Lithobius rubriceps Newport, 1845 (Chilopodan Lithobiomorpha). J. nat. Hist. 20: 23-29
Lewis, J.G.E. 1965. The food and reproductive cycles of the centipedes Lithobius variegatus and Lithobius forficatus in a Yorkshire woodland. Proc. zool. Soc. Lond., 144:269-83

J.G.E. Lewis

An Interesting Myriapod Site at Carlisle, (VC70) Cumberland.

Bulletin of the British Myriapod Group 5 (April1988)

Addendum : Miscellanea - Abnormal coxal teeeth in Lithobius forficatus L.

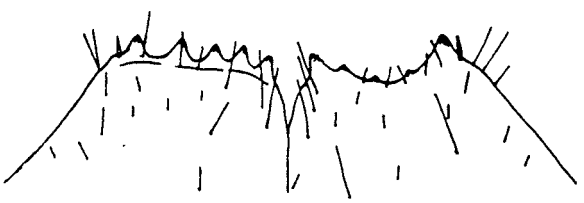

Fig.1. L.forficatus female,Croydon Hill,nr.Timberscombe,Somerset

DIPLOPODA: Nanogona polydesmoides - [illegible]

Brachychaeteuma bradeae - Numerous specimens in the central area under stones and boards in December 1986.

Melogona gallica - 3 adults (2♂, 1♀) amongst wet, undecayed Fagus litter in a depression under trees.

M.scutellare - Abundant under stones and in litter.

Proteroiulus fuscus - Common under the bark of damp dead trees.

Blaniulus guttulatus - Odd specimens under bricks and logs in the central area in summer and December 1986.

Archiboreoiulus pallidus - 1 adult ♂ under a stone in the centre of the wood which had only been placed there 1 year previously.

Tachypodoiulus niger - Few specimens on old greenhouse wall in September 1986.

Cylindroiulus britannicus - As well as occurring under the bark of a damp Ulmus log this species was common under boards on a horse manure heap with much undecayed straw.

C.punctatus - Abundant under bark and in deep litter.

C.vulnerarius - This blind julid was plentiful under a partly buried plastic sheet in the centre of the wood in December 1986.

Julus scandinavius - A species which is apparently rare in this area, the only record being of a single ♂ taken with the last species.

Ophyiulus pilosus - Odd specimens from litter at various times of the year.

Polydesmus gallicus - 1♂, 1♀, in December under an old carpet on the site of the greenhouse.

Macrosternodesmus pallicola - Abundant in December under a board on friable loam in the centre of the wood.

D. Bilton, 55 Beechgrove, Stanwix, Carlisle, Cumbria.

Albino Millipedes

Two albino specimens of Cylindroiulus punctatus were found among approximately 340 individuals of this species, collected in 1981 and 1982 in Brinkenwood in the New Forest, Hampshire (41/274059). One was an eighth stadium female and the other was a ninth stadium animal. They were very pale, with no pigment in the ocelli. I have found no similar specimens of this species from other locations, and have never seen albino forms of other species which are normally pigmented. If anyone else has records or knowledge of albino millipedes, I would be interested to hear about them.

I.M. Jensen, 22 Cardiff Road, Reading, Berkshire.

There have been various records of albino millipedes including a number of albino female Polydesmus denticulatus found by one of us (ADB), and examined by J.G.B., from the Central Cemetery, Plymouth under stones and in litter, 4.vi.87. They were distinctly unusual in appearance. (Eds.)

Spider mimics Millipede

One of the most frequent misconceptions concerning millipedes is that they all have to live permanently in damp conditions. While this is undoubtedly true for most members of the group, some species have evolved a remarkable ability to survive in extremely dry conditions. In the U.K. the bristly millipede Polyxenus lagurus is often found in very dry conditions under bark or crawling over walls in full summer sunlight. While attending the Second International Symposium on Terrestrial Isopods held in Urbino in Italy last September, I was amazed to see large numbers of pill millipedes crawling over the kerbstones at the sides of roads in the town, fully exposed to the hot midday sun. They were identical to British Glomeris except for the presence of prominent red spots on the dorsal surface which made them very conspicuous. This red colouration is presumably a warning to predators that the potentially tasty morsel contains noxious chemicals including a substance called 'glomerin', a sticky secretion which acts as a powerful sedative. Some people have suggested that the red colouration mimics the red hour-glass pattern on the black widow spider but Parker & Cloudsley-Thompson (1986, Newsl. Br. arachnol. Soc. 45, 2-4) have pointed out that the reverse must be the case. Vertebrate predators such as birds and lizards might well be

deterred by the hard cuticle and repugnatorial secretions of a millipede, but a black widow would never get the chance to bite them.

S.P. Hopkin, Department of Pure and Applied Zoology, University of Reading.

Cannibalism in a lithobiid centipede

On 10.8.1987 I was on Caerketton Hill in the Pentlands, VC 83, with my son and my six and a half year old grand-daughter. Prompted by her request, "Can I help you look for beasties, Poppa?", I decided to turn over stones, remnants of a dry-stone dyke, lying in the grass and heather. I took the larger stones, she tackled the smaller ones. As you can guess I found nothing, she uncovered centipedes. Consequently I turned over a medium sized stone and found on it two lithobid centipedes, one about 16-18 mm. long, and a smaller one about 5-6 mm. long. Even as I fumbled for a collecting tube to capture them I saw the larger seize the smaller, which thrashed about convulsively, presumably as poison began to take effect. This smaller one disappeared from my view; it took me some time to realise that the larger animal had so manouvred its prey that it lay along the length of the underside of the body, held by the legs. I had one very brief view. It then ran and before I could move it had slid off the rounded stone and disappeared into the heather. An animal, comparable to the larger specimen, taken at the same time and place has been identified as Lithobius crassipes.

C.P. Rawcliffe, 35 Comely Bank Row, Edinburgh.

Blaniulus guttulatus (Fab.) - An Unexpected Carnivore?

On 18th January 1988 whilst casually searching some leaf litter in the ashwood below Carreg Cennen Castle (Carms. VC44, 22/668189), I noticed two individual Blaniulus guttulatus with the anterior third of their bodies inside the trunk of a larger millipede which had lost the approximately rear half of its body. On closer examination it was noticed that the larger millipede (which was subsequently determined as Ophyiulus pilosus) was still alive, in spite of the blaniulids embedded in the hollowed-out rear end of its remaining trunk. Presumably it was the feeding blaniulids that had eaten away some of the internal parts thus causing the hollowness, and they were continuing to feed on the unfortunate Ophyiulus when I disturbed their feast.

This event reminded me that when I overturned a large bone (with some flesh still adhering to it) some two weeks previous (2.1.1988 at Ty'r fran, Llanelli, VC44, 22/513015, I was surprised to find underneath it a concentration of some two score Blaniulus guttulatus; whereas the surrounding scrub-grassland only had a low density of the species. The unwelcomed effects of the blind blaniulids on horticultural crops is well-known, but the above observations suggest that the diet of Blaniulus guttulatus is not just vegetarian!

I. K. Morgan, Nature Conservancy Council, 16 Barn Road, Carmarthen, Dyfed.

Bulletin of the British Myriapod Group 5 (1988)

from: CAMERON, L.C.R. 1919. Minor Field Sports. London: Routledge

MISCELLANEOUS SPORTS

Millipede Racing

All the sports previously dealt with are outdoor sports, and subject more or less to fine-weather conditions. Millipede-racing is an indoor pastime and may be enjoyed on the inevitable wet day that comes sooner or later during the finest summer. Apart from that it may be described as the most minor of all minor sports; but there is some fun in it not-withstanding, and no element of cruelty to the millipede.

There are many millipedes, but so far as I have discovered only one racing millipede. This is known to naturalists as Julus terrestris and may be looked for and found in large numbers under stones, decaying wood, bark, or the roots of plants, under heaps of leaf-mould, and not infrequently climbing about porches and doors in damp weather. It is a very handsome little beast about an inch in length, being shiny black on the back, and bright silver underneath, with the softest of silken legs of a pale fawn colour. It curls up in a small ring when at rest, and races best on a polished table-top.

All that is required is for each owner to select his Julus terrestris, which are then placed in a row at one end of the table, a barrier or starting gate in the shape of a foot rule being placed before them, and the edge of the table and each side of the "course" blocked with books to prevent their "bolting". Once they start, on the removal of the ruler, they go like steam, with occasional brief pauses for enquiries, probably; and a pool or sweepstakes can be arranged, the owner of the one that reaches the other end of the table first taking the pool. They will sometimes cross and foul one another, and a good plan is to lay down lathes lengthways so that they cannot do this, after the manner in which dog-racing grounds are laid out and with a similar object in view. If it is proposed to keep an outstanding racer it should be placed in a dark box and fed upon bulbs and roots.

(Contributed by S.M. Turk, Shang-ri-la, Reskadinnick, Camborne, Cornwall)

(The species referred to is probably Tachypodoiulus niger - Eds.)