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MILLIPEDES ON THE MOVE: INVASION OF A HOUSE IN CHESHIRE BY TACHYPODOIULUS NIGER AND JULUS SCANDINAVIUS

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On 23rd September 1982 the Zoology department at the University of Manchester received a telephone call from a Mr Worth who lived on the edge of a fairly new estate at Appleton Thorn, Lymm, Cheshire. He had been experiencing problems of large numbers of millipedes marching into his house, either through the front door or a large picture window, and being careless enough to get squashed on the carpet. He was actually more interested in trying to stop the onslaught, but agreed to allow us to observe the invasion in action. So, on a warm, dry evening we arrived to find, as expected, hoards of Tachypodoiulus niger (Leach) tramping round the house and trundling along an adjoining fence. Mr Worth apologised that he had just swept the front doorstep and we therefore collected the sweepings. These contained 29 T.niger from stadium VII to stadium X with a predominance of stadium VIII (16). Both males and females were represented (17 females, 11 mature males and 1 intercalary male). Also present were 6 female Julus scandinavicus Latzel (stadium X). Nineteen other animals were gathered from the ground around the house and these included 2 more J.scandinavicus.

We then turned our attention to the fence beside the house. This was covered with millipedes out for their 9pm constitutional. In the space of about 10 metres we collected 122 T.niger, all but 8 ranging from stadia VII to X (66 females, 36 mature males, to immature males and 8 juveniles of stadium V). Again the dominating stadium was VIII (80 specimens). There were no intercalaries found here, and no J.scandinavicus.

Having failed to convince the occupiers of the house that millipedes were wonderful animals we left them to continue their war against the invaders, and, for comparison, turned our attention to a more usual habitat nearby. A mere 10 minutes collecting on a bank beside the road close to the house produced a catch of 17 T.niger and 27 J.scandinavicus. Females, mature and immature males were present for both species, but no intercalaries were found.

At the back and one side of the house was a field being cultivated for wheat. It is possible that the building of new houses had disturbed the habitat of the millipedes in some way. However, none of the other houses appeared to be as attractive to the millipedes, and all of the houses had been present for several years. T.niger is well known for its wandering habits (Fairhurst, 1970) and such invasions have been recorded before notably by Scott (e.g., 1958, 1959). It is interesting to note that the invasion included a mixture of ages and sexes and a few J.scandinavicus. It is fortunate that this was not on the same scale as invasions recorded for another Schizophylline millipede, Ommatoiulus moreleti Lucas. In Australia the abundance of this species had been known to cause train stoppages (P. Bailey pers.com.).

References

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