

THE BMIG SPECIMEN COLLECTION

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INTRODUCTION

On becoming affiliated to the British Entomological and Natural History Society, the British Myriapod and Isopod Group was invited to add a specimen collection of woodlice, millipedes and centipedes to the extensive insect collection housed at the Society's Headquarters at Dinton Pastures Country Park, Reading. This is just off the M4 motorway in central southern England and has convenient parking - a contrast to the inconvenience and expense of cities for most people travelling by car nowadays. John Harper volunteered to kick start the collection and, the initial phase having been completed, it has been transferred to BMIG - of which the Curator and Librarian is Steve Gregory - contact details below.

Likely contributors were contacted via a request in the BMIG newsletter no. 9 (Autumn 2004) and individually. Specimens have been received, with grateful thanks, from the following (in order of samples contributed): Ian Morgan, John Harper, Eric Philp, Adrian Fowles, Arthur Chater, Mike Kilner, Roy Anderson, Greg Jones, Helen Read, Peter Smithers, Simon Warmingham. Particular thanks go to Ian Morgan who contributed nearly 300 of the approx. 635 samples.

STRUCTURE AND PURPOSES OF THE COLLECTION

1. **Basic Collection** - aimed at providing quick and simple access for beginners to check initial determinations or just to familiarise themselves with the species. There is one bottle for each species, and the bottles (106 at present) are in list order with the screw top of each named. Microscope slides of relevant parts for identification (e.g. legs and secondary sexual structures for small woodlice and some millipedes) have been prepared for some species.

The basic collection could be extended to include species found in Europe, or even further afield, if time and space permit. With the extensive trade in containerised plants and commodities generally, more overseas species are bound to turn up in the British Isles and reference material and literature would be invaluable to help identify them.

2. **Research Collection** - this comprises approx. 530 samples at present. Some species which are rare or difficult to find are represented by just one tube, while widespread species are represented by many tubes; we aim to acquire one sample per species from each vice county, as a minimum.

The aims of the research collection are to acquire material for future study which may include:

- a) Study of interspecific variation - aim for an extensive spread of localities if species are known to vary or intergrade; for example variation in the *Brachychaeteuma bagnalli* / *bradeae* complex.
- b) A resource for studying intraspecific / geographic variation, whether or not presently recognised, for example regional variation of subspecies ratios in the *Oniscus asellus* aggregate.
- c) Voucher specimens if a species is new to Britain; or separately - England, Wales, Scotland, Ireland.
- d) Having material available in case a potential cryptic species is found in British populations - e.g. the occurrence of *Haplophthalmus montivagus* found among *H. mengii* collections.

- e) A repository for voucher specimens for any species, or whole collections, referred to in a published article; for example, Ian Morgan's paper on south Wales myriapods, (Morgan, 1988).
- f) Collections of someone who moves on to other fields and wishes to safeguard his/her collection for posterity and make it available to other researchers; this situation has arisen with the generous donation of his collection by Ian Morgan, which also qualifies under e) above.
- g) A repository for collections (not bequeathed to a museum) so they are not lost through indecisiveness.
- h) Extending the collection as a source for the study of European species.

DOCUMENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE COLLECTION TO DATE

Details of all samples have been entered onto a Microsoft Access database to aid search and analysis. Fields have been provided for all the usual and likely collection data, including UTM coordinates, features of special importance, attributes of the sample or locality, published references, etc. Selections of the data can be made from the database and printed or sent as email attachments.

The tables below have been compiled to give some indication of species representation and geographic distribution of samples as the collection stands at end 2006. Clearly there is ample scope for further species to be added. Also there is a great geographic imbalance with 77% of the 635 samples coming from Wales; this helps to explain the considerable imbalance in the number of tubes for each species as those uncommon outside south Wales are relatively poorly represented.

Table 1: Number of Species on British List and number represented in the BMIG Collection

Taxa	Species on List	Species Represented
Woodlice	54	29
Millipedes	60	46
Centipedes	54	31

Table 2: Distribution of Samples by Region

Region	No. of Samples
Southern England	122
Northern England	10
Wales	493
Scotland	4
Ireland	6

ADDITIONS AND ACCESS TO THE COLLECTION

Steve Gregory (BMIG's Curator and Librarian) would welcome samples from anywhere - particularly: i) voucher specimens from a noteworthy record or study; ii) those that help the geographic balance of the collection; iii) specimens from remote areas; iv) local species; v) species known to show intraspecific variation; or vi) species difficult to find. Before sending any samples, please contact Steve to check up-to-date arrangements.

Anyone is welcome to examine the collections. However as the basic collection may be used for demonstration at meetings, or parts of the research collection may be on loan, it would be strongly advisable to contact the Curator before any intended visit to Dinton Pastures, in order to check the current situation, and obtain up-to-date access arrangements. Also requests for data and specimen availability should be directed to Steve.

DATA ON BMIG WEBSITE

More detailed information on the collection and tables of species coverage are viewable on BMIG's website: www.bmig.org.uk

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The generous donation (donors listed above) of samples has allowed the collection to be established. For Bijou bottles, tubes and slide boxes thanks go to Steve Gregory, Helen Read, Valerie Standen and to those people who sent their specimens already tubed. To Steve Gregory (woodlice), Paul Lee (millipedes) and Tony Barber (centipedes) thanks are due for providing up-to-date taxonomic lists for their respective groups. Keith Alexander, Steve Gregory, Helen Read and others have provided helpful ideas and discussion.

REFERENCE

Morgan, I.K. (1988) Recent records of Myriapods in South-West Wales. *Bull. Br. Myriapod & Isopod Gp.* **5**: 11-23

CONTACT DETAILS FOR THE COLLECTION

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