

A LARGE NEOTROPICAL MILLIPEDE IN EUROPEAN FLOWER POTS

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In March, 2000, a number of large millipedes were found in the telephone office of Umeå University, northern Sweden. A male from the sample was sent to HE by Dr. Göran Andersson, Natural History museum of Gothenburg, and was tentatively identified as a species of the Neotropical genus *Chondrodesmus* (Chelodesmidae), which was confirmed by Dr. R.L. Hoffman, Martinsville, Virginia, undisputed World leader in the taxonomy of Chelodesmidae.

Some years later, in 2006, the same exotic millipede species again appeared in Sweden, again in a flowerpot with a palm, but this time in Söderköping in the south-central part of the country. In 2007 there were further finds in Sweden, including in plants purchased in an IKEA store.

In January, 2007, several specimens were found in the lobby of an office in Copenhagen. The millipedes lived in a big, heated flowerpot housing a palm (*Phoenix robbelini*) and caused some concern among the office personnel. Mr. Anders Thomsen from the company Indoordesign established a contact to the Natural History Museum of Denmark, and thus two males, two females, and two juveniles were collected. The larger juvenile, a subadult male, constructed a spherical moulting chamber ca. 2½ cm in diameter and after several weeks appeared as adult. Several plants linked to the finds in Denmark and Sweden were linked with Dutch suppliers (Andersson & Enghoff 2007).

Upon broadcasting the Scandinavian finds, a reply was received from Mr. Thomas Wesener in Bonn, Germany, who in January 2007 found four females of what must be the same species in a flowerpot in Bonn. He further reported three additional similar cases having been discussed in the German millipede forum (www.diplopoda.de), including reports of reproduction in a terrarium.

It would thus seem that *C. cf. riparius* is well established in the flowerpot habitat in Europe and is likely to be found in Britain in the future.

Chondrodesmus is a large genus, with ca. 40 species described from tropical America (Ecuador and Brazil north to Veracruz and Guerrero, Mexico (Hoffman 1980). The most recently described species is from Brazil (Golovatch *et al.* 1999). Hoffman (1999) lists the 23 Central American species but there is no recent checklist of the South American ones. The most recent key to species is that of Attems (1940) who recognised 24 species (plus 11 uncertain species which were not included in the key).

Using the key of Attems (1940) one comes without problems to *C. riparius* Carl, 1914, a species described from Bodega Central on the Magdalena river, Colombia, and apparently never recorded since then. The Scandinavian specimens largely match the very accurate description provided by Carl (1914) but there are some small differences, the significance of which cannot be assessed without a comprehensive review of the entire genus. The taxonomically important gonopods exactly match Carl's description and illustration of *riparius*. For the time being, the Scandinavian specimens may be identified as *Chondrodesmus cf. riparius* Carl, 1914.

For North Europeans, it is quite an impressive millipede (Figure 1). Females are ca. 6 cm long and 9-10 mm wide, males are slightly smaller, about 5 cm long and 8 mm wide. The colour is a warm,

reddish brown, with strongly contrasting yellow markings on the lateral “wings” (paranota). If it must be compared with a familiar species, it looks vaguely like a gigantic version of the common hothouse millipede *Oxidus gracilis* (C.L. Koch, 1847).



Figure 1: *Chondrodesmus* cf. *riparius* Carl, 1914

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