ARMADILLIDIIUM PICTUM BRANDT, 1833, DISCOVERED IN STAFFORDSHIRE, AND
COMMENTS ON ITS HABITAT ASSOCIATIONS

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Gregory (2009) suggests that Armadillidium pictum may have been overlooked in areas within its British
range. It is now possible to add Staffordshire to the counties where it has been found, extending its known
distribution at the southern end of the Pennines. It was found on two occasions in one small area in
Dimmings Dale in Staffordshire Moorlands District. This dale is a wooded ravine, a tributary stream of the
River Churnet cutting through the Bunter Sandstone and exposing several outcrops of the harder Keuper
rocks (according to the SSSI citation). The precise location of the records lies on the south side of the ravine,
but on the east-facing slope of a small re-entrant valley (SK054428), within Threap Wood. While the slopes
are generally heavily wooded with oak Quercus, this particular patch is very open, more of a large and
apparently permanent glade with bracken Pteridium aquilinum and bramble Rubus fruticosus agg. the
dominant vegetation, with much climbing corydalis Ceratocapnos claviculata. While beating this vegetation
over a sweep net in search of corydalis weevils, a single A. pictum was found in the net on 2 June 2009 and
again on 6 August 2009, in virtually the same place. The first specimen was retained as a voucher and
identified with the help of Gregory & Richards (2008).

Gregory’s (2009) habitat description – the presence of suitable rocky terrain, such as talus slopes with
accumulations of scree, rocks or boulders – is close but in this case the talus slopes are derived from
Sandstone and are of a fine sandy material. The species seems to favour sheltered, humid situations, on
 friable and free-draining soils, but tree canopy does not seem to be important. The species has been
 provisionally classified as belonging to the F3 shaded field and ground layer assemblage in Natural
England’s developing Invertebrate Species and habitat Information System (ISIS) (Drake et al., 2007) but
this clearly is incorrect as shade does not appear to be essential – soil drainage characteristics are perhaps
the single most important factor for many terrestrial invertebrates and this factor needs greater prominence in
ISIS.

The conservation issues here relate to forestry and rhododendron. The site is now owned and managed by
Forest Enterprise, although this small re-entrant area appears to be under minimum-intervention management.
Rhododendron has been controlled elsewhere in the Dale but this small area has just a few isolated bushes
and has not yet been affected. It is not known whether the disturbance caused by rhododendron control
would be damaging to the woodlouse, through soil disturbance and/or compaction, but too much
rhododendron would probably be worse. Much of the Dale has been designated a SSSI, including the
woodlouse site.

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REFERENCES


Shrewsbury: FSC Publications.

ISIS is a computer application that Natural England is developing for the recognition and scoring of invertebrate assemblage types. In particular it addresses the analytical methods needed to interpret survey results, including Natural England’s method for implementing the Common Standards Monitoring of invertebrates on designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest. The assemblage classification is intended to reflect the structural features of the habitat requirements of invertebrates, to link the species with conservation management rather than vegetation types per se. Thus for *A. pictum*, soil drainage and air humidity at ground level are more important than the plant species which form the vegetation, and so lack of disturbance is the key conservation objective - to classify this species as a shade-demanding species misses the point and could potentially lead to damaging conservation management operations.