

THE 'READING WOODLOUSE WATCH 1987'

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INTRODUCTION

This article is composed of the final results of a survey of the distribution of species of woodlice in the Reading area conducted during the Spring and Summer of 1987. The report is self-explanatory. It is presented as a practical example of what can be achieved for very little cost and (slightly more!) effort and will hopefully stimulate others to conduct similar surveys on woodlice and other invertebrates in urban areas. The rather unusual arrangement of pages is a result of the report being distributed as an A3 folded sheet which substantially reduced printing costs.

THE SURVEY

Apart from the (possibly unique) scientific information obtained on the distribution of an invertebrate group in an urban area, a number of other factors emerged on the best ways of conducting such a survey. It is vitally important to have all the literature prepared in advance so that enquiries can be responded to immediately. Be prepared to be phoned up at regular intervals to answer questions such as "this strange looking woodlouse has just appeared in our bath, would you like to come and look at it?". Answer - no, but if you bring it to me I will tell you what it is! (do not let slip your home telephone number at any cost). Enlist the help of your local Naturalists Trust who should let you put the initial circular in their mailings which saves a fortune in postage costs. The total cost of the Reading Survey was only about £50 (photocopying and postage) which was partly covered by a grant from the Reading Urban Wildlife Group.

With hindsight, I would not have bothered to produce a detailed key to all types of woodlice likely to occur in Reading since the only species found by the general public (apart from the 'Famous Five' with which they had no problem - five year old children found them easy to identify) were Androniscus dentiger and Platyarthus hoffmannseggii which turned out to be much more common than I would have expected. The 'Famous Five' guide was a great success and I would use this again (with Androniscus and Platyarthus added - the 'Secret Seven'? - you can tell I was brought up on Enid Blyton). The species included would, however, have to be adapted for the geographic area in question, especially further north where Armadillidium vulgare may be rare. Common names are absolutely essential and despite the

squeals of the purists, I would forget involving the general public at all unless these are used. Mine are only suggestions and it may be best to adapt names to make them more suitable for the local situation.

The final point is that the most useful result of the Survey may not have been the records (since no member of the public found species other than the Famous Five, Androniscus and Platyarthrus - all other records are my own), but an increase in awareness of the diversity of soil animals in urban areas (particularly among school children who became quite involved in hunting for "chuggy pigs") If you do decide to get involved in such a scheme, learn to smile. The local media just love woodlice!

I am happy to provide more detailed information on the finer points of the Survey on request to the address above.

Results of the Survey

The records are presented as presence or absence of a species from each 1 km square of the Survey area. Solid black shading indicates at least one record from somewhere in the square. Some squares contain up to four records for a single species. 88 of the 200 squares had at least one record, a quite respectable coverage under the circumstances.

It is clear that the most common woodlice are Armadillidium vulgare, Oniscus asellus, Philoscia muscorum, Porcellio scaber and Trichoniscus pusillus. These 'Famous Five' species were found by almost all respondents to the Survey and must be present in large numbers in every 1 km square in the Reading area.

Androniscus dentiger, Platyarthrus hoffmannseggii and Trichoniscus pygmaeus were found much more frequently than I had anticipated. These three species are also probably present throughout the Reading area although they were not recorded from as many squares as the Famous Five because they are more difficult to find.

Three more species, Ligidium hypnorum, Porcellio spinicornis and Haplophthalmus danicus, are probably fairly common in the region but were very rarely found because of their retiring habits. For example, one morning I found a single Porcellio spinicornis in my bathroom sink but despite extensive searches at night by torchlight, I have not found any further specimens of this nocturnal species either inside or outside the house.

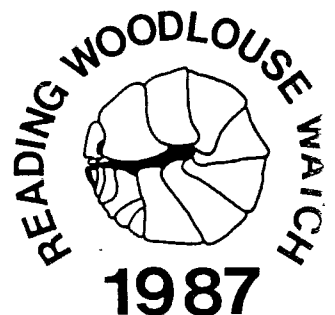
The remaining nine species are apparently very rare although they must certainly be present in several more squares than are indicated on the maps. All the sites for Armadillidium nasatum, Cylisticus convexus and Porcellionides pruinosus were synanthropic (i.e. associated with human activity) and when found, these three species were quite abundant. Trichoniscoides albidus was found in very damp habitats on the banks of the River Thames and River Pang where it was rare. Single specimens of Trachelipus rathkei and Porcellio dilatatus turned up among rubbish behind the Prospect Park Mansion House (where Porcellionides pruinosus was extremely abundant) and two Porcellio laevis and Armadillidium depressum were found in Forbury Gardens in the middle of Reading. Several of these records are 'firsts' for Berkshire. Furthermore, the north bank of the River Thames east of Goring is the only known inland site in South East England for Haplophthalmus mengei.

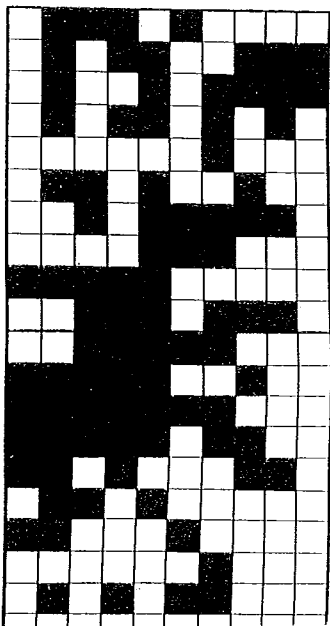
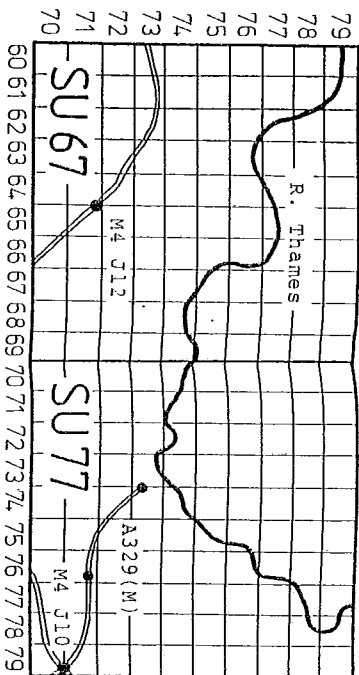
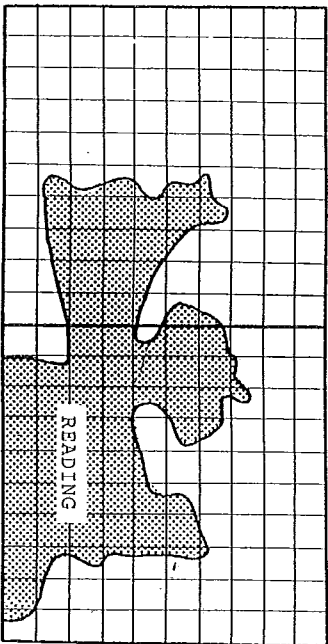
Conclusions

The four aims of the Survey have been accomplished thanks to the enthusiastic support of the Reading Urban Wildlife Group and the schoolchildren, teachers and members of the public who sent in records. It is hoped that the 'Reading Woodlouse Watch 1987' will stimulate other urban wildlife groups to conduct similar surveys of invertebrates in their own areas.

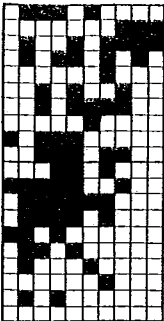
Dr. Steve Hopkin
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December 1987

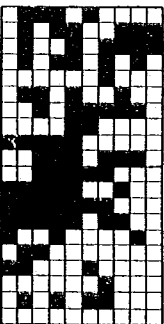




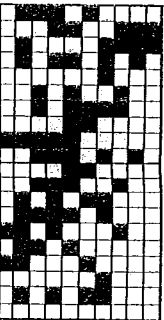
ARMADILLIDIUM
VULGARIS



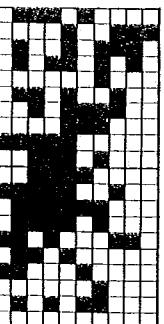
ONISCUS
ASELLUS



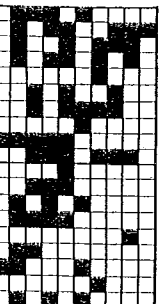
PHILOSOCIA
MUSCORUM



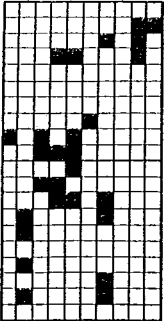
PORCELLIO
SCABER



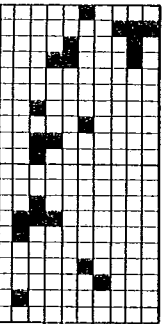
TRICHONISCUS
PUSILLUS



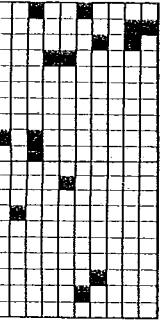
ANDRONISCUS
DENTIGER



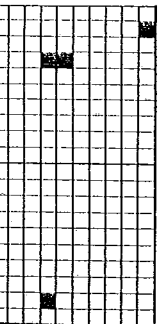
PLATYARTHURUS
HOFMANNSEGGI



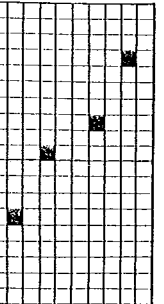
TRICHONISCUS
PYGMAEUS



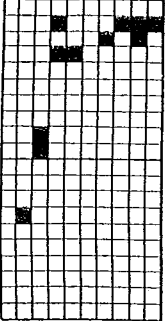
LIGIDIUM
HYPNORUM



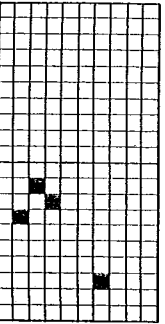
PORCELLIO
SPINICORNIS



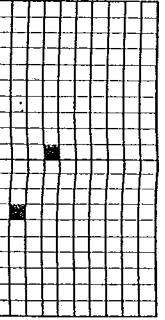
HAPLOPHTHALMUS
DANICUS



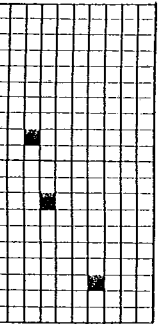
ARMADILLIDIUM
NASATUM



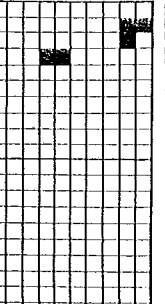
CYLISNICUS
CONVEXUS



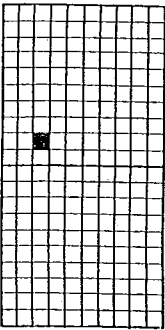
PORCELLIONIDES
PRINOSUS



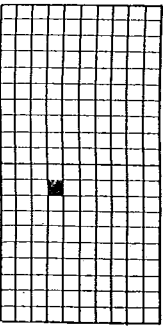
TRICHONISCOIDES
ALBIDUS



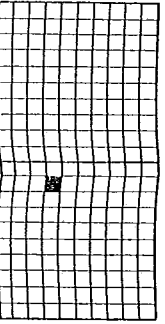
TRACHELIPUS
RATKEI



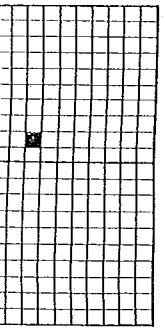
ARMADILLIDIUM
DEPRESSUM



PORCELLIO
LAEVIS



PORCELLIO
DILATATUS



HAPLOPHTHALMUS
MENGEI

