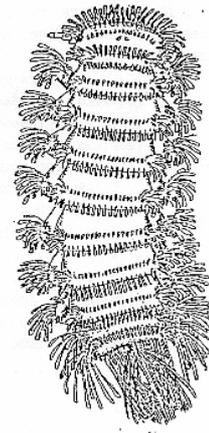




British Myriapod and Isopod Group



AUTUMN 2001

Newsletter number 3

Editor: Paul Lee

John Gordon Blower 1923-2001

Members of the group will be saddened to learn that Gordon Blower died in August this year after a short time in hospital. The father of modern myriapodology in Britain, he was well respected in this country and across the world, not only for his work but also for his kind and gentle nature.

Everyone looking at millipedes in Britain must have used his book, *British Millipedes*, and will be familiar with the wonderful illustrations as well as the informative text. His contribution to biology was substantially greater than just this publication however. He contributed considerably to the knowledge of millipede life histories and post embryonic development, soil biology in general and fieldwork techniques, in particular animal population estimation. He was a great influence to many students studying at Manchester University where he spent most of his working life. He will be sorely missed for both his expertise and his company.

A full obituary and a complete list of his publications will be published in the next British Myriapod and Isopod Group Bulletin.

Helen Read

BMIG business

The editor sends his apologies to all readers for the lateness of this issue. In part at least this was due to a total lack of contributions from anyone when I first sat down to write this in October but threats of violence and begging letters have finally elicited sufficient response to produce an issue in time for Christmas! However the number of contributors is very small (look how often Steve Gregory's name appears below) and I make no apologies for repeating my plea for contributions from the last issue.

In one way and another the last year has been a difficult one and I trust that 2002 will prove better. The foot and mouth crisis has restricted fieldwork for many, not least those hoping to travel to Ireland in the spring. August brought the sad news of the death of Gordon Blower, a man I feel privileged to have known both as an outstanding academic and a kind and thoughtful friend. Personally my year was blighted back in May when I had to surrender my driving licence for a year following a seizure. The drugs prescribed by the hospital were raised to a higher dosage by my GP and only now that has been corrected do I recognise how tired and befuddled the drugs were making me. At least the Irish trip finally took place this autumn and later in this issue

Steve Gregory gives those of us that could not get there a taste of what we missed.

It is time already to look forward to the next annual meeting and field trip in Spring 2002. Yet again Derek Whiteley has done an excellent job of making arrangements for a visit to Youlgreave in the Derbyshire Peak District from 4-7 April. You will find a booking form included with this Newsletter. Derek needs to have the numbers for the Youth Hostel accommodation by the end of January so you need to get those booking forms in quickly. An important aspect of the weekend will be an informal social event celebrating the lives of Ted Eason and Gordon Blower on the Saturday evening. Plans are underway to put together a more formal memorial meeting at a later date. An autumn field visit, possibly to Kew Gardens, is also being planned for next year and more details should be available in the next Newsletter.

Help! - A plea for contributions

Your contributions for both the Bulletin and this newsletter are urgently required. Any short notes or articles about centipedes, millipedes, other myriapods, woodlice, water slaters, etc would be gratefully received. Examples could be

tips on locating elusive beasts, notes of species in unusual habitats, notes of species found outside their known range, brief updates on county surveys or whatever. If you are uncertain whether your contribution should go in the newsletter or Bulletin send it any way. The editors will decide on the best place for publication and may even put a piece in both publications – remember that Newsletter articles have not been officially published. Whatever they may be, use this newsletter to keep your colleagues informed of your fieldwork and related activities.

Millipede Recording Scheme news

I have to admit there has been little progress towards the provisional atlas this year due to a combination of work commitments and illness. As a result I am keen to receive further records for inclusion in the dataset so please keep sending in the record cards. Over the last year Gordon Corbet has been the major contributor of records and amongst other things he has extended the range of *Leptoilulus belgicus* to the Isle of Eigg. Keith Alexander, prompted by a guilty conscience after seeing the distribution maps in previous newsletter, has also sent in a large batch of record cards and Bill Dolling has sent in some important Yorkshire records. Other than that the only noteworthy records I have received were more cave specimens from Max Moseley including *Nanogona polydesmoides* and *Tachypodoiulus niger* being consumed by the spider *Metellina merianae*. Gordon Blower, in his Linnean Society synopsis, reported his own observations of *T. niger* in the webs of *Amaurobius* species and Bristowe's record of *Meta menardi* eating a *Polydesmus* millipede in a cave. In their *Biology of Millipedes*, Hopkin and Read do not mention spiders as predators of millipedes although the book does contain a photo of a Lycosid spider suffering the adverse effects of the defensive glands of *Glomeris marginata* after attacking a specimen. Has anyone else got records of spider, or any other invertebrate, predation on millipedes that they have never bothered to publish? If so now is the time to write a short note either for the Newsletter or the Bulletin and make sure your observations do not get lost to science. Paul Lee, 155 Corton Road, Lowestoft, Suffolk.

Outstanding Isopod Records

Thanks to all who have submitted records to the scheme in the past year. Neil Robinson has submitted some valuable sightings of *Armadillidium pictum* and *Platyarthrus hoffmannseggii* in northern England. I have also received a copy of Peter Harvey's woodlouse records for Essex. Quite a substantial set of records and very few grid squares where *Ligidium hypnorum* has not been recorded.

Going through the backlog of record cards I spotted a few notable records from the mid-1990s as follows. Martin Cawley added *Armadillidium depressum* to Ireland with two sites in Waterford City and has also found *Haplophthalmus danicus* at Killarney. Gordon Corbet has found *Platyarthrus hoffmannseggii* at several sites in Fife, currently the northern-most records in Britain. These may have been mentioned in a previous newsletter, but never mind.

Steve Gregory, Northmoor Trust, Little Wittenham, Oxon. OX14 4RA

Trichoniscid season is upon us!

Now is the time to find those normally elusive soil-dwelling Trichoniscid woodlice. Even common species such as *Trichoniscus pygmaeus* are much easier to find in cold weather, especially if wet or frosty. In most of southern and eastern England *Trichoniscoides albidus* can be found under stones or rubble embedded in soil near ditches, rivers and other damp areas. A pile of bricks in a ditch is a classic site. In the southern calcareous woodlands *Haplophthalmus montivagus* can be found under stones or dead wood. *Haplophthalmus mengei*, a species normally thought of as occurring in damp sites, can make an appearance on dry chalk grassland, often in association with notoriously elusive *Trichoniscoides helveticus*. Again large stones embedded in soil are a good bet, but I have found both species under small pieces of surface flint in really heavy frosts (don't ask me why, I don't know!). In churchyards *T. sarsi* may turn up, but I have yet to find this species in Oxfordshire. However, I have frequently encountered other elusive soil dwelling species in churchyards, including the Geophilomorph centipede *Brachyschendyla dentata* and the Shelled Slug *Testacella haliotidea*.

I have found all the above woodlice in mid summer – even during a heat wave – but this typically entails time consuming and tedious hand searching up to ½ metre into soil. Turning over a stone or two in winter is much quicker (which is just as well if it really is that cold). Winter is also the only time of year to find adults of the winter-active Chordeumatid millipedes. So don't put away your hand-lens and specimen tubes for the winter – the season is only just beginning!

Steve Gregory, Northmoor Trust, Little Wittenham, Oxon. OX14 4RA

Electronic Records - Catching up with the 1990's!

It is apparent that an increasing number of people are storing their records in various electronic formats. I am not an IT expert, but I am trying to get to grips with this 1990's technology (better late than never!). Over the past year I have been toying with the idea of receiving data for the woodlouse recording scheme directly from such sources. This has a number of advantages – not least that the recorder (that's you) doesn't have to complete records cards and BRC doesn't have to then re-enter the same data into their computer at a later date. It also makes the analysis of the data, e.g. the production of up to date distribution maps, extremely simple for scheme organisers (that's me) to undertake.

For this to work easily it is essential that people stick to a standardised format that doesn't require me doing too much 'massaging' of disparate files. My long-term aim would be to enter records into Recorder 2000, an excellent way to collate and output species records that is compatible with the computer at BRC. However, data entry is off-puttingly slow and I find entering into a Recorder 2000 compatible spreadsheet is much simpler and quicker. Perhaps this is the sort of approach the woodlouse scheme should encourage. Essentially each row of the spreadsheet represents one species record. The fields required would be some-thing

like: Species name, BRC species number, Grid reference, Location name, Vice-County, Recorder, Determiner, Date.

This winter I hope to settle on a mutually compatible format acceptable to recorders, scheme organiser and BRC (Monks Wood). If anybody has any comments to make on this subject I would be interested to hear.

Steve Gregory, Northmoor Trust, Little Wittenham, Oxon. OX14 4RA

BMIG Annual Field Meeting to Ireland

Due to the outbreak of foot and mouth, this year's BMIG field meeting to Ireland was delayed until October. Derek Whitely organised a minibus from Sheffield, with pick-ups on route. The minibus got off to a shaky start (or judged to perfection depending on your view-point) and caught the ferry with just minutes to spare! Others made their own way to Ireland to give a total of 17 participants, boosted by a few Sorby NHS members. The Irish contingent was conspicuously absent, but Aoife Brennan, from University College Dublin, joined us for the duration.

The first night in Ireland was spent at a farm in the south-east near New Ross. It was dark, but undeterred torchlight surveys recorded eight species of woodlouse, including *Oritoniscus flavus* (common in this part of Ireland!) and *Porcellio dilatatus*, from the farmyard. The elusive millipede *Ophiodesmus albonanus* was also captured. Day light added another five species of woodlouse, but millipedes and centipedes were much harder to come by. A promising start to the trip! The remainder of the weekend was based around the Dingle peninsular in the south-east. Excursions were made by minibus to a number of coastal localities and inland sites, including a day spent in Killarney National Park (a large tract of ancient woodland and wetland). The final day, on route back to the ferry, was spent following the river Blackwater valley (more *Oritoniscus*!).

As expected, the woodlouse *Porcellionides cingendus* was found at most sites visited. The occasional eye-catching fluorescent-yellow male, without a hint of darker mottling normally characteristic of this species, was encountered. *Armadillidium vulgare* and *Platyarthrus hoffmannseggi*, (both common woodlice in southern England) proved to be scarce. Eagle-eyed Paul Richards found *Trichoniscoides albidus* under turf beside a small church in Killarney National Park. This is the third record of this elusive woodlouse in Ireland.

Millipedes were also interesting with a number of apparently rare species in Ireland being found. *Polyxenus* was found in Killarney National Park (Des Kime had previously found the species here). Both *Choneiulus palmatus* and *Cylindroiulus londinensis* were found on the coast. *Chordeuma* was also found, but one specimen was an unidentifiable female (who's got the other one?). *Cylindroiulus caeruleocinctus* was found at Lismore Cathedral. Many of these are new to Ireland according to the Preliminary Atlas (1988), but Dick Jones reliably informed the group that all have been recorded in the last decade. Never mind we did our best!

Predictably, both *Lithobius forficatus* and *L. variegatus* proved to be common centipedes. *L. borealis* was the most frequently encountered of the 'small' Lithobiid centipedes, both in coastal and inland habitats. Of the Geophilomorphs, *Necrophloeophagus flavus* and *Brachygeophilus truncorum* were also common in all habitats. *Geophilus electricus* and *G. carpophagus* (the rural form) were found on the coast, but we failed to find *G. osquidatum* (a widespread species in south-western England).

Other invertebrates were also collected, including the Harvest-spiders *Anelasmacephalus cambridgei* and *Dicranopalpus ramosus*. According to the 1988 Provisional Atlas both are new to Ireland, but if the millipedes are anything to go by, I suspect this is no longer the case. Keith Alexander (under threat of death!) found a rather splendid Kerry Slug (*Geomalacus maculosus*) for the group to admire - a very handsome beast indeed. (Is that Keith or the slug? - Ed.)

So far I have received records for 18 species of woodlouse, 19 millipedes and 13 centipedes. There are still outstanding records that I have yet to receive and the lists will undoubtedly be added to. A full report will be prepared for the 2002 BMIG Bulletin. Apologies if this note seems slightly biased towards woodlice, but I know its what you expect of me! Our thanks go to Derek for organising a successful trip and for driving everywhere during the entire trip.

Provisional species lists for BMIG Ireland field meeting 2001

Woodlice

Androniscus dentiger
Armadillidium vulgare
Cylisticus convexus
Haplophthalmus danicus
Haplophthalmus menzei
Ligia oceanica
Oniscus asellus
Oritoniscus flavus
Philoscia muscorum
Platyarthrus hoffmannseggi
Porcellio dilatatus
Porcellio scaber
Porcellio spinicornis
Porcellionides cingendus
Trichoniscoides albidus
Trichoniscoides saeroeensis
Trichoniscus pusillus
Trichoniscus pygmaeus

Millipedes

Blaniulus guttulatus
Brachydesmus superus
Brachyiulus pusillus
Choneiulus palmatus
Chordeuma sp.
Cylindroiulus britannicus
Cylindroiulus caeruleocinctus
Cylindroiulus latestriatus
Cylindroiulus londinensis
Cylindroiulus punctatus
Glomeris marginata
Nanogona polydesmoides
Nemasoma varicorne
Ophiodesmus albonanus
Ophiulus pilosus
Polydesmus angustus
Polyxenus lagurus
Proteroiulus fuscus
Tachypodoiulus niger

Steve Gregory, Northmoor Trust, Little Wittenham, Oxon. OX14 4RA

BMIG and the National Biodiversity Network

The BMIG scheme organisers (Tony Barber, Steve Gregory and Paul Lee) were observed recently 'networking' at a conference for representatives of national recording schemes (and afterwards in the bar of the Hoop and Toy). The conference, held at the Natural History Museum, London on 16th November 2001, was organised by the Biological Records Centre (BRC) for the National Biodiversity Network (NBN). The meeting aimed to inform scheme organisers about NBN and to discuss how national recording schemes can benefit from it.

The National Biodiversity Network has been developing gradually over the last five years. It is a framework by which organisations with an interest in information about species and habitats in the UK can share their information. The NBN web site (www.nbn.org.uk) gives a lot of information about how NBN works, who is involved and the projects being undertaken. It is still evolving rapidly as more organisations get involved and additional funding is obtained for projects.

Several NBN projects are of particular relevance to BMIG and its members.

- 1 *Linking national societies and recording schemes* is led by BRC and Trevor James was recently appointed as Development Officer for the project. This project is aimed at encouraging societies and schemes to plan and develop their recording activities, and in particular to share their records with others and to recruit and train more recorders.
- 2 *NBN Gateway* is the internet system for sharing records and other information. This project is also led by BRC, jointly with the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC). This highly ambitious project is the 'shop window' for biological records. It is still being developed, but it is worth looking at the web site (www.searchnbn.net) and trying it out. The Gateway will enable recording schemes to access their own records directly (instead of having to go via BRC) and as a result to share them with others.
- 3 *Recorder 2000* is a data management package developed by JNCC specifically for NBN. The first release had problems and it has received some criticism, but this is leading to changes and further developments. Further information can be obtained via www.nbn.org.uk.
- 4 *Species Dictionary* is being developed by the Natural History Museum to provide (eventually) a complete list of the flora and fauna of the UK, with synonyms. A pilot version is on the internet (<http://yaw.nhm.ac.uk/nhm/>), but it is not due to be released publicly until May 2002.
- 5 *Linking local records centres* was led by The Wildlife Trusts for three years and examined many of the issues relating to the setting up, management and funding of local centres, including the relationship with national recording schemes. Although this project is currently under review,

further work is going on especially in south-west England, led by English Nature.

Two issues are common to many recording schemes.

- 1 *Backlogs of records not yet computerised.* This is a particular problem for the Centipede Scheme. We (NBN and BRC) are looking at the problem of backlogs of records generally. We will be seeking funding to help to clear backlogs for priority groups, but we are realistic that this is unattractive work for funding from grants or sponsorship.
- 2 *Getting access to the collated records from a scheme.* The NBN Gateway will be the method for giving access to records, and we should be able to begin to add some data from BMIG schemes within the next year.

I hope this gives you a flavour of what is the National Biodiversity Network. If you have access to the internet, have a look at the websites I have mentioned. BRC now has its own web site, which helps to explain how BRC is changing to play a full part in NBN (www.brc.ac.uk). Paul Harding, BRC, CEH Monks Wood, Abbots Ripton, Huntingdon

Classifieds!

For disposal: Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London 1961-1973 (34 parts), Journal of Experimental Biology Vols 32-49, contact – Simon Dawson, 44 Boston Avenue, Reading RG1 6JU, phone 118-8612-342 or e-mail edawson@extra.co.nz. Elliot W. Dawson, Museum of New Zealand, Te Papa Tongarewa, PO Box 467, Wellington, New Zealand.

NEXT NEWSLETTER: SPRING 2002

Please send your contributions to reach the editor by 28 February 2002
Supplies of record cards and additional copies of the British Myriapod and Isopod Group Newsletter can be obtained from the Biological Records Centre.

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