

A new BMIG Intertidal Marine Isopod Recording Scheme

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When the Isopod Recording Scheme was set up by the British Isopod Study Group in 1968, it initially included marine as well as freshwater and terrestrial isopods (Gregory, 2009: 7-8). In 1970, the Marine Recording Scheme (as detailed in Holdich & Lincoln, 1974) separated from the Non-marine Isopod Recording Scheme and operated for a number of years under the direction of David Holdich and Roger Lincoln. However, due to a lack of records and difficulty verifying the records of other observers, the scheme petered out and has not been revived since, though David Holdich and others have continued to gather records for marine species and many of these have fed into the National Biodiversity Network (NBN) database (nbn.org.uk).

The discontinuation of the Marine Recording Scheme is regrettable. The marine isopods constitute an important group of organisms that are extremely under-recorded (as revealed, for example, by the sparsity of dots on the NBN maps for British and Irish species). Fieldwork by the author in south-east Scotland, for instance, has shown that a good range of species is present, but there are few if any records for most of them in the area. Their study has much to tell us about the health and diversity of marine environments and the effects of human disturbance and climate change. Whilst study of the sub-littoral species necessarily remains a specialist pursuit, around 70 intertidal species may be encountered by field-recorders, and their identification is greatly aided by the publication of *British Marine Isopods* (Naylor, 1972) and especially its updated edition *Intertidal Marine Isopods* (Naylor & Brandt, 2015). Identification of the intertidal isopods is of a difficulty similar to that of woodlice, centipedes and millipedes, and most species can be readily identified by a suitably informed field-worker, though some require examination under higher magnification. Good quality photographs/micrographs of the whole animal and of key characteristics are in most cases sufficient to confirm identification, and this is one advantage that we have today over the original Marine Isopod Recording Scheme, where verification of records proved troublesome.

There is every reason, therefore, why the time is ripe for a new intertidal marine isopod recording scheme. The technology available to us today, in terms of digital photography, online communication and electronic submission of records, means that many of the difficulties encountered by the original Marine Recording Scheme can be overcome. For example, the Biological Records Centre's iRecord website (www.brc.ac.uk/irecord) is ideally suited for gathering intertidal isopod records (and indeed many such records have already been added to it), as it allows recorders to submit not only field details but also photographs to help with verification. Once verified, these records can feed into national recordings schemes and databases such as the National Biodiversity Network, enabling us to assemble a detailed picture of the distributions and environmental preferences of these poorly understood organisms.

Given that it already oversees recording schemes for freshwater and terrestrial isopods, as well as for centipedes and millipedes, the BMIG is ideally suited to overseeing a new intertidal marine isopod recording scheme. This is a natural extension of its remit, especially since the Non-marine Isopod Recording Scheme already includes aquatic species outside of Oniscidea (the Asellids). The recent exclusion of *Ligia oceanica* from Oniscidea on genetic grounds and its placement closer to the sub-orders Valvifera and Sphaeromatidae (Dimitriou, Taiti & Sfenthourakis, 2019) further blurs the boundaries. The difficulties in recording sub-littoral species and the artificial separation of these from

the intertidal species remain, but in practical terms the intertidal species are a fairly well defined group whereas the sub-littoral species remain beyond the reach of most observers (as indicated by the restriction of coverage in Naylor and Brandt 2015 to intertidal species).

In order to support a new intertidal marine isopod recording scheme, a list of intertidal marine isopods with details on identification and distribution has been added to the BMIG website, using the model provided by the woodlice, centipede and millipede pages (www.bmig.org.uk/checklist/marine-isopods-checklist). In addition, verification of marine isopods records on iRecord has begun. The new BMIG-led intertidal marine isopod recording scheme launched at the end of 2020, with iRecord being used as the primary means for gathering records, though of course more traditional avenues are also available. Fieldworkers are encouraged to submit marine isopod records to iRecord, including as much information as possible along with photographs of the whole animal and key ID characteristics. For further information on the scheme and how to submit records, visit www.bmig.org.uk/page/marine-isopod-recording-scheme.



Eurydice pulchra Leach: a common intertidal isopod found on sandy shores around the coasts of Britain and Ireland (image © Warren Maguire).

References

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