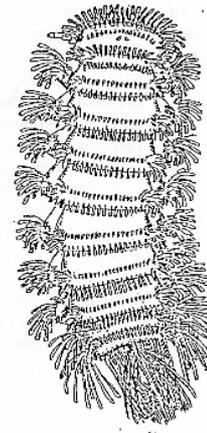




# British Myriapod and Isopod Group



Autumn 2007

Newsletter number 15

Editor: Paul Lee

## BMIG business

You will have received this issue of the newsletter a little later than is normal. There are various reasons for this but a key one was the dearth of copy I had received by the end of September. It is good to see some new names contributing to this issue but I still need more BMIG members to put pen to paper or finger to keyboard and send in their observations. A number of such observations on swarming millipedes have produced the series of notes in this issue. These came through various sources and only one was intended originally as a newsletter article. However, the combination of all three observations along with the response from Helen Read makes for an interesting piece.

As usual, you should have received details of the BMIG AGM and Field Weekend with this autumn issue. Mark Winder has arranged for us to be based at Swansea University while we explore the fauna of South Wales at the end of March 2008. We already know the millipede fauna of the area includes several species new to Britain although the exact species involved have yet to be determined. Who knows what else awaits discovery? As always prompt returns of booking forms will be much appreciated. Paul Lee, Oakdene, The Heath, Tattingstone, Ipswich IP9 2LX

## 2008 BMIG AGM and Field Weekend

The 2008 meeting will be held from Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> to Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> March 2008 and will be based at the University of Swansea. We will be arranging a programme of sites to visit in one of the most habitat rich areas of Britain. The Swansea area has a wide, unexplored range of sites including post industrial areas that may yield synanthropic species of note. The winter-mild, limestone coast of Gower also has great potential. The only UK site for *Oritoniscus flavus* and the only mainland site for *Trachysphaera lobata* lies within easy reach of Swansea. *Armadillidium album*, *Metatrichoniscoides celticus*, *Geoglomeris subterranea* and *Cylindroiulus vulnerarius* are also found in the area.

The full cost of the weekend including accommodation for three nights and all meals is £147 although this will be subsidised as BMIG are in receipt of a grant from CCW. The reduced cost will be calculated once firm bookings have been received. It is also possible to book for part of the

weekend. Full programme details will be published nearer the time. If you have any queries please e-mail me at [mark.winder@swansea.gov.uk](mailto:mark.winder@swansea.gov.uk) or phone on 01792 850 578 (evenings and weekends) or 01792 635 784 (weekdays). Mark Winder, Endsleigh, Blue Anchor Hill, Penclawdd, Gower, SA4 3LZ

## AGM notice

All BMIG members are invited to attend the AGM to be held at 7pm on Friday 28<sup>th</sup> March 2008. The venue will be the Singleton Park site of the University of Swansea. The minutes of the 2007 AGM held at the Bishop Mascall Centre, Ludlow are on the BMIG website so you can check what was said last time.

The present committee is keen to receive nominations for new committee members from any BMIG member. Ideally nominations would be communicated to the secretary beforehand but they can also be made from the floor at the AGM.

## BUGS BRITANNICA: Searching for stories about man and woodlice

If you have any interesting stories about British isopods and related species, I would very much like to hear from you. Let me explain. I am writing a book to be called Bugs Britannica. It will be in the same style as *Flora Britannica* and *Birds Britannica*, that is, a richly illustrated, large-format book of about a quarter of a million words. Like its illustrious predecessors it will be about the ways in which invertebrates enter our daily lives, as subjects in fiction, song and poetry, as symbols (for example in advertising or in corporate logos), as food or medicine, or inspiring us in some other way. Conservation projects will come into it especially where they are community based or say something about the way we regard woodlice. There would be room for stories about spectacular invasions of woodlice, or unexpected encounters and the like – anything that is interesting, scintillates or amuses.

Perhaps I should say something about the title, since not everyone will like their favourite animals being labelled as 'bugs'. The book will include all invertebrates found in Britain down to the shoreline (though not all of them will be singled out individually). It will not be about invertebrate

natural history or identification as such, but about the interface, the points of contact, between their world and ours. In other words, Bugs Britannica is about invertebrates as they are seen and encountered by the British (not just the scientific British!). Given the alternatives of Invertebrate Britannica, Mini-beasts Britannica, Boneless Britannica and so on, the title seems inevitable to me, but do tell me if you can think of anything better (though it will have to satisfy the marketing people at Chatto & Windus)..

I do have some information about woodlice already, particularly some of their many local names, and that curious medieval woodlouse in stained glass in St Mary's Church, Shrewsbury. I also have a copy of Arthur Chater's paper on woodlice in fiction, and 'the Woodlouse Sermon' from early issues of *Isopoda*. Do you know of other figures of woodlice in public places, or other examples of isopod art, or any uses or games we put them to (including children's games – nice or horrible)? Does anyone still use woodlice medicinally? Do we still call them by names like chuggy-pigs and chiselbobs? (What are they called in Welsh?) Does anyone distinguish the different species (pill-lice and sea slaters apart) apart from oniscologists? How many oniscologists are there, by the way? Are there interesting and unexpected ways of detecting and studying woodlice?

So, if you have any stories about isopods, from land, water or shore, do drop me a line. It would be nice to give isopods a good showing, given their familiarity and rich 'lore'. All contributions will be acknowledged by name in the book. For more information about the project you can visit our website at: [www.randomhouse.co.uk/bugsbritannica](http://www.randomhouse.co.uk/bugsbritannica) which contains a 'blog' for short contributions (no pictures, please; they block up the system and we're not commissioning yet). Alternatively, you can write to me at: Bugs Britannica, PO Box 1375, London SW1V 2SA.

As for the book itself, expect to see something towards the end of the year after next (the uncertainties are broad at this point).

Peter Marren, Bugs Britannica, PO Box 1375, London SW1V 2SA.

### ***Trachysphaera* in South Wales**

While investigating Ian Morgan's Llanelli site for *Oritoniscus flavus* in March 2007, I sieved some moss samples and found the woodlouse pretty quickly. However I was amazed to see also several tiny whitish pill millipedes with strong transverse ridges which I immediately guessed were *Trachysphaera lobata*. Samples of the topsoil were taken home, sieved and searched with more positive results - six males and eight females total on that first occasion. Further specimens have been found in subsequent visits. There appears to be some doubt whether the Isle of Wight specimens belong to the species *lobata* or a closely similar one. cursory examination of the gonopods of a Llanelli male suggests that they are quite similar to the drawing from the IoW specimens which Dick Jones kindly sent me. Over the coming months I will be trying to assess whether the *Trachysphaera* occurs in a very restricted area or is more widely distributed in south east Llanelli.

John Harper Email: [jfh22@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:jfh22@tiscali.co.uk)

### **The Diplopoda and Isopoda of British caves – A genetic study to determine the magnitude and direction of gene flow between cave and surface populations**

Diplopoda and Isopoda are not generally common in British caves but two species stand out as regularly seen. They are the diplopod *Nanogona polydesmoides* and the isopod *Andronicus dentiger*. These two species are classed as troglophiles because they are able to form breeding populations both in caves (the hypogean environment) and on the surface (the epigean environment). This is in contrast to troglobites which are found only in hypogean environments. There are no troglobitic diplopods or isopods in Great Britain.

When we find examples of a widespread surface species, such as *N. polydesmoides* or *A. dentiger*, in a cave the immediate obvious question is:

Is the cave population self-sustaining or is migration of animals from the outside necessary to maintain the population?

Of course there is a spectrum of possibilities; at one extreme the cave population may be totally self sustaining with no migration into the cave from outside. At the other extreme continued migration of animals into the cave is necessary in order for the cave population to be viable. The real answer probably lies between these two extremes and with temporal and spatial fluctuations.

Very little is known about the magnitude and direction of migration (and therefore gene flow) between cave and surface habitats. In Italy it has been shown that cave populations of *A. dentiger* are totally isolated from each other, and from the surface. There is no gene flow between populations. Nothing is known about the situation in Great Britain.

I am setting up a collaboration of caving clubs to collect sample of these two species from caves so that we can examine this problem. I am writing now to ask if members of BMIG would also help with this. All I need is a leg or two preserved in 100% ethanol, together with an 8 figure (or better) grid reference of where the sample was collected.

In the first instance I need only expressions of interest from anyone willing to help. Please do not send me samples yet as I have a lot of work still to do to get the necessary DNA sequencing in place. Please contact me if you think that you can help. I will supply full details to those who reply. Graham Proudlove, British Cave Research Association Biological Recorder, Department of Zoology, The Manchester Museum, The University of Manchester, Manchester M13 9PL  
Email: [g.proudlove@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:g.proudlove@manchester.ac.uk)

### **A new record of *Cylindroiulus caeruleocinctus* (Wood) in South Yorkshire?**

Whilst digging up a vegetable bed to plant some potatoes in my front garden (located in Stocksbridge, some 10 miles northwest of Sheffield on the Coal Measures of South Yorkshire) on 7 April 2007, I unearthed what appeared to be a single *Cylindroiulus caeruleocinctus*. By chance my first acquaintance with this millipede species occurred only the previous week where I discovered another single specimen

(subsequently identified by Paul Lee) at a disused limestone quarry on Wenlock Edge during fieldwork for the BMIG annual meeting at Ludlow, Shropshire.

I kept this specimen briefly indoors until it escaped when I forgot to replace the top of the container it was in after taking some digital photographs. Prior to escape, I was able to briefly examine the specimen under a microscope and found features to identify it as *C. caeruleocinctus* (no measurements were taken). These features included the general brassy appearance of the trunk and a width that appeared to be more or less the same for most of the length of the body giving the impression of a stoutly built species. These are features, however, also shared with the closely related *C. londinensis*.

Paul Richards (Richards, 1995) notes the apparent absence of *C. caeruleocinctus* within the Sheffield area and he makes no mention of *C. londinensis*. The recently published national atlas for Britain and Ireland (Lee, 2006) shows an absence of post-1980 records for *C. caeruleocinctus* (and a total absence of *C. londinensis*) in South Yorkshire with two or more pre-1980 records shown for two 10km squares (SE5010 & SE4010) comprising areas of Barnsley and Doncaster in South Yorkshire and parts of West Yorkshire. The nearest records shown by Lee for *C. caeruleocinctus* appear further south with at least two post-1980 records for locations in the northeast Derbyshire (SK3070) and the Mansfield areas (SK5060). From existing records *C. caeruleocinctus* is considered to be strongly synanthropic (Lee, 2006) and there must be many parks, churchyards, allotments, gardens and cultivated fields that have the potential to support this species both locally and nationally where it has not been yet recorded.

#### References

Lee, P. (2006) *Atlas of the Millipedes (Diplopoda) of Britain and Ireland*. Pensoft. Sofia-Moscow.

Richards, P. (1995) *Millipedes Centipedes and Woodlice of the Sheffield Area*. Sorby Record Special Series No.10. Sorby Natural History Society, Sheffield City Museum. Sheffield.

Jim Flannagan

#### **Myriapod Memoranda Volume 10**

The latest volume of *Myriapod Memoranda* contains three papers, each proposing new taxa: (1) a further contribution to Australian paradoxosomatids; (2) a discussion on the status of the subgeneric names of West European *Lithobius* species; (3) an annotated catalogue of the Indo-Australian Platyrrhacidae. This time I have added a list of my previous scientific papers. (Reprints of many of these earlier contributions are still available to colleagues who are interested.) Altogether there are 101 pages. Please inform me if you are interested in obtaining a copy of this latest volume.

CAW Jeekel, Vinkenbos 22, NL-4851 ER ULVENHOUT, The Netherlands  
Email: cjeekel@cs.com

#### **Swarming millipedes 1**

On Sat 14<sup>th</sup> April 2007, shortly after the BMIG AGM weekend, I walked along the West Marina, St Leonards on

Sea, East Sussex (TQ 78870 08747). I carried out a quick search for invertebrates and was very surprised to observe 100 - 200 *Blaniulus gutulatus* in a writhing mass. The microhabitat for this event was underneath bark chippings in the border of a flower bed. Conditions were sunny but mild. The ground underneath the chippings was damp. The bed was the nearest to the beach and is only separated from the beach by the marina and seawall. There appeared to be no food present. Interestingly, there appeared to be colour variations whereby the red spots of some were much brighter than others.

The reason for the swarm might have been mating but I did not think to stop and investigate this further. I wonder if anyone else has seen or reported anything similar? I took one voucher and sent it to Paul Lee for confirmation.  
Richard Price

#### **Swarming millipedes 2**

I am the "Coleoptera and Other Orders" Recorder for the Harrogate and District Naturalists' Society and recently (July 2007) had a strange sighting relayed to me by one of our members: He was walking in Wharfedale when, at the top of Simon's Seat, a local landmark some 1200 ft high (at a guess), he found the rocks at the summit to be covered in "myriads of millipedes", so close together that it was impossible to walk without squashing "dozens of them". He described them as being of a bronze-iridescent colour and about 1.5cm in length. He counted the legs per segment and is satisfied that they were millipedes (He is a Biology teacher and a good general zoologist - my first thought was that they were Antler Moth larvae which have reached plague proportions in the area this year). I wonder if there is any connection between the two events i.e. if the Antler Moth larvae had depleted the millipede food supplies in some way?

I should be most grateful for any comments - I've never heard of "hill-topping" in non-flying invertebrates before!  
Jim Jobe

#### **Swarming millipedes 3**

I was walking yesterday (May 23) in the Dark Peak area of the Peak District, when I saw literally tens of thousands of millipedes, all in a very small area. It started in small quantities on the moorland, then as I walked down into a deciduous-wooded valley, their numbers increased dramatically. They were on every tree/branch, every rock. They were especially concentrated near the stream in the valley, on all the rocks in/by the side of the stream. As I walked out of the woodland their numbers began to decrease again. I've never seen anything like it, they almost covered rocks by the stream for about half a mile!

Chris Noble

#### **Swarming millipedes – a response**

Swarms of millipedes have been reported in this country several times. The only one I have seen was in and around some houses in Cheshire about 20 years ago. It is not known what causes the swarms. Sometimes it may well be change of habitat (in Cheshire the houses were newly built within an arable field and we speculated that this might

have been caused by disturbance/loss of habitat). Certain millipedes are very active and *Ommatoiulus sabulosus* is one of these. The adults are strong walkers and it is possible that swarming is just a method of mating/dispersal, certainly in tropical countries this seems to be the case. The situation in Cheshire involved two very similar looking species that are hard to tell apart and were not species that we might have expected walking actively around above ground in daylight.

Cases of swarming have been reported to stop trains running in Japan and an introduced species in Australia appear to be attracted to light and cause problems around houses because of their sheer numbers. In both cases the millipedes are about the same size as those found in Britain. The short answer is that we do not know what causes large numbers of millipedes to appear together. Even in Britain it appears that there are several species that can do this, and mixtures of species, as appears to be the case in the situation in the Peak District are also not unknown.

I am not aware of a similar situation on the top of a hill, as described from Wharfedale, nor am I aware of any connection between antler moth larvae and millipedes. Millipedes are detritivores and generally feed on dead leaves and other decaying matter so I would not have thought there was any competition for food.

Helen Read, 2 Egypt Wood Cottages, Egypt Lane, Farnham Common

### **The Striped Millipede *Ommatoiulus sabulosus* in south Hampshire**

Two confessions: firstly, I record very few millipedes indeed, and most of those I do are *Glomeris*; secondly, one of my few millipede records is perhaps of interest, but I failed to send it in to Paul in time for the atlas! Slapped wrists on my part then, and here belatedly is the record in question.

On 2 May 2000 Claire Carvell and I were recording invertebrates at Lyminster Reedbeds Wildlife Trust reserve (south Hants, SZ324965). We were focusing on a stretch of wet woodland along the west bank of the Lyminster River. A large and well-marked millipede caught my attention, sufficiently so for me to take the specimen home and identify as *Ommatoiulus sabulosus*. I believe I am correct in saying that no Hampshire record for this species was shown on the vice-county maps given by Blower (1985), and in the new atlas there is just one dot (SU10) within the south Hampshire vice-county. In the atlas, Paul Lee describes this species as "surprisingly scarce in central southern England".

Unfortunately my field notes are also a bit lacking here, and I didn't record exactly where the specimen was found, but I have a hazy memory that it was among decaying logs. The moral of this story is, a) record more millipedes, b) record them better, and c) send the records in – all of which are lessons that I really should have learnt by now!

Martin Harvey, Great Kimble, Buckinghamshire  
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### **Correction to Bulletin of the British Myriapod & Isopod Group Vol. 21**

On page 75 of Vol.21 of the Bulletin there was a printing error resulting in the loss of part of Table 1: Records of Millipedes from the 1999 BMG Field Meeting in Northumberland. A corrected version of this table is available to download from the BMIG website at [www.bmig.org.uk](http://www.bmig.org.uk). Anyone wanting the corrected table but without access to the internet should contact Paul Harding (see below).

### **Bulletin of the British Myriapod & Isopod Group Vol. 22**

The latest volume of the Bulletin was published in August 2007. It has already been mailed to previous subscribers. The full contents list can be seen on [www.bmig.org.uk](http://www.bmig.org.uk). If you want a copy and have not received one, contact Paul Harding (see below).

Price (for personal BMIG members) *with postage*: £5.00 (UK only) or £7.00 / €10.00 (Europe only). Contact Paul Harding for methods of payment, postage costs to the rest of the world, and institutional subscriptions.

Volumes 1-21: we have a few copies of most volumes for sale. The full contents lists for Vols 17-21 and an index to all volumes are available at [www.bmig.org.uk](http://www.bmig.org.uk). Contact Paul Harding for details of availability and cost.  
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#### **NEXT NEWSLETTER: Spring 2008**

**Please send your contributions to reach the editor by  
29 February 2008**

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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