THE COLEOPTERIST'S NEWSLETTER

Number 17 August 1984

FIELD MEETING Anyone wishing to organise a meeting for 1985 - please send details as soon as possible for inclusion in the November and/or February "Newsletter(s)"

FOODPLANTS OF CHRYSOLINA BANKSI (F.) - In the last "Newsletter", Keith Alexander asked for experiences of the hosts of C.banksi. I failed to collect the beetle from Ballota nigra when I lived in Kent but I was present when others did so, eg at the Higham Saltings field meeting of the "South London" led by E.E.J.Trundell (Proceedings, 1961 (1962):90). There is no doubt that this plant is one of the hosts for the beetle.

From 1961 to 1975 I took C.banksi occasionally, particularly in Ireland, but only seldom could the host be determined; often the beetles would be under stones or crawling over short vegetation. Hostplants that were recorded included Plantago lanceolata and P.maritima. On the first of these there was clear evidence of adult feeding.

When I moved to this address in May 1976, I found that C.banksi was well established under cultivated catmint (Nepeta sp.) in my garden. I reared several adults ab ovo on this host and also tried other plants, both labiates and representatives of other families. Unfortunately, I have mislaid my notes on these breeding experiments but my recollection is that adults and larvae accepted many different labiates readily but also "nibbled" at other plants. Labiates were undoubtedly prefered, however. Among those accepted were

Mentha, Thymus and Lamium species, but this of course does not mean that these plants are eaten in nature. The drought of 1976 killed off most of my Nepeta and all the C.banksi. The beetle has not recolonised my garden.

C.banksi seems to be quite common (singly) in Dorset and the SW generally. Several of my captures have been on or near Plantago lanceolata and one on Stachys germanica. However, it certainly does not occur mainly on Ballota, or even on labiates, though it may favour them to some extent, as do many other species in the genus. As it is easy to breed, the field is open for anyone collecting females to undertake better feeding experiments than mine.

I have asked my colleague at Furzebrook, Dr Lena K. Ward, to interrogate the Phytophagous Insects Data Bank for food-plant associations of C.banksi, and we will report any interesting information.

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(On the subject of breeding Chrysomelids, I was given many years ago a stock of C.fastuosa collected by D.Tozer. I bred these for a year or so, but Mr Tozer was somewhat surprised that I did not get any adults wholly dark bronzy-black; he very kindly sent me some mounted examples. I have been wondering if any readers have turned up this dark form among wild populations; I have never found the beetle in the wild, but according to Mr Tozer, the dark form occurs with the typical green at his Leicestershire locality -- J.C.)

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BACK NUMBERS - the small stock of back numbers of the "Newsletter" has been used, the bulk going to new subscribers. None will be available in the future and duplication of future issues will be confined to 100 or ten more than the current list of subscribers, which ever is the larger -- J.C.

FURTHER NOTES ON BRITISH AND CONTINENTAL SPECIES OF APION -

Mr A.A.Allen's notes in the last "Newsletter" will be useful to coleopterists attempting to "match up" our check list of Apion species against the account in Freude Harde & Lohse vol. 10 and Mr Marsh's helpful translation of the German text.

I do not know when the "Continental usage" of the names curtisi Stephens, waltoni Stephens and curtulum Desbrochers started but it is certainly manifested in Hoffmann's third Faune de France volume (1958) and so has been apparent as different from our own for a long time. Like Mr Allen, I believe that the British application of the Stephensian names is correct; but perhaps the matter needs going into again. Our A.curtisi is certainly a Catapion, but whether Eutrichapion is a "heterogenous and artificial" subgenus is not clear. I personally have strong objections to the splitting of the genus Apion and a system of subgenera seems the only sensible way of dividing the very large number of species into manageable groups. Do we want as narrow a subgeneric concept as that of Wagner (used by Dieckmann (1977), of which more anon), or the wider one established by Hoffman and by Kissinger (Curculionidae subfamily Apioninae of North and Central America, 1968)? I have no hesitation in preferring the latter.

The correct use of the name afer Gyll. for the species known here until recently as platalea Germar was established by Dieckmann (1976) "Revision der Apion platalea - Gruppe (Coleoptera, Curculionidae)", Ent. Nachr.20:117-128. I am glad Mr Allen has spared us a linguistic discussion on whether the name should be afrum or afer. A good case can be made for either name, but let's accept afer and forget afrum!

A.difforme Germ. has been associated with Polygonum hydropiper at least since the time of Fowler (1891), but on what real evidence I know not. As the biology of the species is not known the occurance on Polygonum may have been purely casual. Hoffmann found A.difforme on Trifolium arvense

(loc. cit., p.1625) and quoted Guilleaume as doing so before him, but in the main I agree with Mr Allen's comment about this putative host. Hoffmann also mentions T.maritimum (= T.squamosum), as does Dieckmann (1977) but as this is a saltmarsh plant it cannot be the only host. The only personal crumb of information that I can add is the taking of a male A.difforme in France (Charente-Maritime) earlier this year on a Trifolium I identified tentatively as T.glomeratum. Certainly A.difforme is one of the few British Apion about whose biology there is real doubt.

Having refered twice to Dieckmann (1977) it is necessary to say that Herr Dieckmann has been publishing in parts a comprehensive account of the weevils of E.Germany, in Beitrag zur Entomologie. The groups so far covered are: Ceutorhynchinae (1972), our Nemonychidae and Attelabidae (1974), Apionidae/inae (1977), short-nosed groups (1980) and Tanymecinae to Tanysphyrinae (1983). Fewer species are covered compared with F.H. & L. but the treatment is far more comprehensive and includes good biological information. Most of our British species are included, though as in F.H. & L. A.genistae Kirby and A.scutellare Kirby are absentees. However, the omission of A.genistae is intentional. Dieckmann (1977, p 51) clearly states that A.genistae is not a German or mid-European species. Horion's incorrect record from Bavaria (1951) arose from an error of Wagner's. A.genistae is rare in Europe, with a very narrow "Atlantic" distribution, being found only in Portugal as well as Britain and France, according to Hoffmann. A.scutellare is more widely distributed, extending to North Africa and the Western Mediterranean according to the same author, but is absent from mid-Europe. In a European context Britain has several species with a pronounced western distribution which are consequently either rare or absent from "F.H. & L" country". The latter may have nearly ten times as many Otiorhynchus spp. but has no Cathormiocerus at all. Another example is Anthonomus brunnipennis (Curtis).

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A FURTHER NOTE ON THE FOODPLANTS OF CHRYSOLINA BANKSI (F.)

Following Keith Alexander's note on this topic in the last "Newsletter" readers may be interested to know of my observations on the subject. In my experience C.banksi is common in Cornwall, particularly on the coast. Like Keith, I too, have never found this species associated with labiates. However, on 28.xi.1979 I found an adult feeding on Plantago lanceolata at Prisk Cove, Mawnan, Cornwall. The following day at Loe Bar near Helston I kept two Chrysolina larvae that were feeding on P.lanceolata, expecting them to be C.haemoptera, which is common at this locality, I was somewhat surprised when an adult C.banksi emerged in February 1980.

From the above it is evident that, in Cornwall at least, one of the foodplants is P.lanceolata, though other host species may be involved also. Certainly I have never seen C.banksi on Ballota nigra. Incidentally, this beetle occurs regularly in my parents garden in Cornwall and no B.nigra grows there, or to my knowledge anywhere else in the vicinity.

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DMHF NOTE: Roger Booth writes that if the solid DMHF is dissolved in 70% ethyl alcohol rather than water, it will dry out more quickly and more evenly. Often with water dissolved DMHF a slight "crazing" - formation of minute ridges on the surface skin - occurs.

REQUEST FOR BACK NUMBERS OF THE "NEWSLETTER" - If anyone has any duplicate copies or is prepared to loan certain numbers/or photocopy them - please contact S.A.A.Painter, 108 Hanover Road, Feltham, Middlesex, TW13 4JP

ADVICE SOUGHT: I have been asked to revise the Amateur Entomologist's Society's "Coleopterist's Handbook". So far I have managed to attend to odd bits of various sections, including work on the list of beetle/plant associations. If anyone has any comments or views as to what should be included or omitted please let me know. I would be very interested to hear from anyone with first hand field experience of "window traps" and the "autocatcher".

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ANYONE wishing to contribute to the "Newsletter" should send material before or very early in the month before publication. "Newsletter" generally appears in February, May, August and November. J.C.

NB Your contribution would have helped to fill this page!