

THE COLEOPTERIST'S NEWSLETTER

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Once again I have to remind all subscribers that the subscription for 1988 is now due and once again it is held at £2-00p. Both Peter Hodge and myself would like to urge everyone to pay promptly as the paper-work associated with subscription renewal is a real pain in the neck and best dealt with in one go. Prompt payment also ensures further copies of the "Newsletter", I no longer duplicate extra copies so have no back-numbers to mail later in the year.

Thanks for your support during 1987, we hope you had a profitable year's collecting.

(Please send cheques/postal orders to Peter Hodge, 8 Harvard Road, Ringmer, Lewes, East Sussex, BN8 5HJ and make them payable to "Coleopterist's Newsletter").

J.C.

A TRIP ON THE PATHWAY TO KNOWLEDGE. Not all the stepping stones on the route to knowledge are well-bedded; almost everyone at some time or another trips over these. The following note clears my conscience. On August 13th 1987 in south Worcestershire I glimpsed an oblique dorsal view of a matt brown staphylinid as it disappeared into a colony of the ant Myrmica rubra (L.). The diagnosis seemed clear; well-developed cerci on the last abdominal segment, elongate elytra and a total length of some 6mm. It must have been somewhere in the area of Zyras. Then I wrote to John Owen I mentioned it to him, his rejoinder being that the only solution was to capture another. Later I discussed this with Tom Eccles, and it seemed that the cerci could have been extruded glands - was it Lonechusa we missed? Finally I tracked it down by scrutinising material in the Liverpool Museum - it was a perfect match for Lonechusa emarginata (Pk.) any minor discrepancies being due to the speed of the disappearing insect.

Nevertheless I still wished to take account of John Owen's advice, and finally on September 29th 1987, there it was, in my hand, under a lens, an entirely typical female Lesser Earwig (Labia minor (L.)) !

P.Whitehead, Moor Leys, Little Comberton.

(A good case of taking sound advice! Having just read Henry Seebohm's "The Birds of Siberia" I think this quote is quite apropos = (p. 336) "It seems too bad to shoot these charming little birds, but as the "Old Bushman" says what is hit is history, and what is missed is mystery." Yes, indeed we have all made blunder's similar to the above, the real damage starts if such errors get into print as subsequent correction are often passed unnoticed.

J.C.)

A NOTE ON GRAMMOPTERA RUFICORNIS (F.). On May 28th 1987 I collected a large Grammoptera on hawthorn flowers at Weston-super-Mare. One of Joy's criteria for distinguishing ruficornis is that the antennomeres show a proportion of reddish colouration; in this case the antennae were obscurely infuscated.

This brought to mind a Grammoptera with totally black antennae collected at Pershore, Worcs., on 12th July 1986, and submitted to Paul Hynan, for his workshop manual, as my only known G.variegata (Gern.). One of Joy's hallmarks for this species is that it has black, not bicoloured antennomeres.

The Pershore specimen was submitted to Dr M.L.Cox at the British Museum (Natural History) for an opinion, and he concluded that it was probably ruficornis with black antennae. In distinguishing between these two species it must be necessary to regard some other characters, not personally known to me at present.

P.Whitehead, Little Comberton.

AN OBSERVATION ON POLYDRUSUS PILOSUS GREDLER IN CUMBRIA.

On 22.iv.1987, an old Sitka Spruce cone was picked from the ground at the edge of a small plantation near Gamblesby, Cumbria (grid. ref., NY(35)623386). The cone was collected to amuse my young son during a long car journey from Tyne-side to Merseyside. Within minutes, weevils were observed walking around inside the car and only a little longer to track the source to the cone. Altogether, eight adults representing both sexes, were collected. Dr Mike Morris kindly confirmed my identification and offered a few

remarks . He thinks the insects had probably recently emerged from the soil and for some reason had congregated in the cone. The beetles were confined in a tube for some time but mating was not observed. Hibernation, could be an explanation, but the date followed an exceptionally warm Easter and the open nature of a Sitka cone is not suited to this activity.

Dr Morris tells me this is the first Cumbrian record for P.pilosus.

Ian Wallace, Liverpool Museum.

INTERSPECIFIC COPULATION IN CANTHARIS SPECIES.

On June 13th this year I came across a mating pair consisting of a male Cantharis cryptica and an apparently co-operating female C.decipennis, at Pot Riding Wood, South Yorkshire (SE5200). With some trepidation, never having reared cantharids before, I decided to have a go at rearing the progeny, should any arise, but was spared the attempt as the female was dead on arrival at home. I've never witnessed interspecific mating in Coleoptera before, but my observation reveals that hybridization may not actually be an impossibility for some species pairs. Could this explain those all too frequent specimens that fall between two species descriptions in the published keys??!

Roger Key, N.C.C., Peterborough.

LOCHMAEA CAPREA (L.) DEFOLIATING CROWBERRY IN WEST YORKSHIRE.

In late summer I received a phonecall from Mr F.C. Ideson from Horrodiddle near Hebden Bridge, West Yorkshire to say that large areas of Crowberry (Empetrum nigrum) moorland on Haworth Moor (SE44) were being killed off by small grubs similar to those of the "heather beetle". On request he sent me a large batch of larvae, together with a good sized bag of crowberry (not a common plant in Cambridgeshire!). Dr.M. Cox at the Commonwealth Institute of Entomology kindly identified a sample of larvae as Lochmaea caprea (L.), a species that normally feeds on various species of Salix, and he suggested that the larvae may be dropping off sallows on the moorland rather than feeding on the Crowberry itself. This appears not to be the case, there being almost no Salix on Haworth Moor, and the larvae were collected directly off Empetrum itself, where it was feeding on the growing tips of the shoots and causing extensive dieback over almost 50 acres of moorland.

I have since reared about 20 adults from the larvae, half on Empetrum supplied by Mr Ideson, and half on common sallow Salix caprea. They proved to be perfectly normal Lochmaea caprea, and this seems to be the first record of this species on this foodplant.

Roger Key, N.C.C., Peterborough.

WEST CUMBRIAN MEETING - ROWRAH HALL, 26th-28th JUNE, 1987.

For the 31 assorted entomologists (mostly coleopterists), this year's field meeting was all but washed out by the weather and if it had not been for a number who had gone up there a couple of days earlier, when the weather was fairly reasonable, the species list would have been very short indeed. At the suggestion of John Read and the local NCC and Trust, we had over 40 potential recording sites.

Saturday was reasonable, with sunny intervals in the southern part of the West Cumbrian coastal strip, while those who went north suffered just enough showers to make beating and sweeping impractical. On Sunday it poured! For the first couple of hours, people sat around mounting specimens from the previous day, watching the puddle in the car park coalescing into fair sized lake, and waiting for the heatwave to arrive that the radio said was progressing northwards. People eventually started drifting away for sunnier climes, leaving the stalwart few who had booked accommodation for the Sunday evening to join in a desperate attempt to find at least a few beetles in an excursion in the downpour to the shingle beds at the head of Ennerdale Lake. We ended up drying off and drinking coffee at John Read's house.

No "rip-snorting goodies" seem to have turned up in the lists submitted so far other than those species which were known about previously. Pete Kirby found Hypocaccus rugiceps, currently graded Red Data Book category 3 at Eskmeals, and a number of people turned up rare Dyschirius species at the same site. Sad to say, the hunt for Dyschirius and Bledius prompted a reproachful comment from the Cumbrian Trust who run the reserve and kindly gave us permission to collect and granted access. Apparently the earthworks so created took out a fair proportion of the flat sand at the edge of the salt-marsh among the Salicornia and were not filled in again afterwards (also stones were overturned and not replaced at Clints Quarry). Surely we shouldn't need to send everyone who goes on these meetings a copy of the JCCBI Code for Insect Collecting. Please, please take heed. Sometimes its hard enough getting permission to collect specimens on a site and entonologists might not be allowed back to places if we don't act responsibly.

Many thanks to those who have already sent in species lists - to the remainder, I would be grateful if you could let me have any lists fairly soon. We also hope to hijack them for the N.C.C.'s Invertebrate Site Register for Cumbria, which is due out in the fairly near future, so if you will let me have them in the next month or so, it would be most useful. I will produce a full list, and a supplement to last year's Radnorshire meeting, with the next "Newsletter".

Roger Key, N.C.C., Peterborough.

(It is very sad that the occasional spot of irresponsible collecting, of which I am pretty sure we have at times all been responsible, gets reported. Last year I was involved in showing the gentleman in charge of Windsor Forest/Park around Moccas Park NNR with various members of the NCC and the owner's agent. This was to explain how the management policy at Moccas works, to show conservationists as humans sympathetic to needs required in managing a Royal Park and to allow general discussion at an informal level. The day was a great success, but various acts of vandalism were mentioned by the Windsor contingent - generally leaving a mess of red-rotten mould and/or bark around collecting trees but one instance of scattering a pile of cut timber too. Surely as visitors on private land we all must act with utmost responsibility. The actions of one or two tend to get everyone a bad name. Tidying up does not take much time - even tidying someone else's mess!) J.C.

WELSH PEATLAND INVERTEBRATE PROJECT.

In April 1987, the Nature Conservancy Council team commenced a three year project to investigate the invertebrate fauna of Welsh peatlands. The survey team has three members based at the NCC offices in Aberystwyth. The sampling strategy is based upon the use of pit-fall and water traps with some additional information being obtained from litter samples.

The sites studied in 1987 vary from the vast raised mires of Cors Fochno and Cors Caron in Ceredigion to the rich fens of Castlemartin Corse and Penally in South Pembrokeshire. The following two years will see us moving on to sites in North, East and South-east Wales.

We have only just started to sort through the material collected, but already some interesting distribution patterns have been discovered and many unusual species identified.

Of the Coleoptera, we are identifying the carabids and larger staphylinidae ourselves and have had kind offers to identify our water beetles, aleocharines, weevils and cantharids by Garth Foster, Tom Eccles, Paul Hyman and Keith Alexander respectively.

Interesting carabids recorded to date include the ombrotrophic mire specialist Agonum ericeti, plus the notable species, Pterostichus gracilis, Elaphrus uliginosus, Blethisa multipunctata, Trechus secalis and Chlaenius nigricornis, the latter species being closely associated with areas flooded in winter. Casual chrysonelid records include Galeruca tanaceti, Altia ericeti and Cryptocephalus aureolus. At one site we found the Alleculid Ctenopius sulphureus.

These sites have received little or no attention in respect of their invertebrate fauna. Wales is generally under-recorded entomologically, so many exciting discoveries await. If anyone feels that they would like to help the survey by looking at a particular group, we would be delighted to hear from you. Beetle families for which we have a

reasonable amount of material are Chrysomelidae, Ptiliidae, Pselaphidae, Melodidae, Cryptophagidae and Scydnaenidae. We also have smaller amounts of material for a number of other families.

Peter Holmes, David Boyce and David Reed, Welsh Peatland Invertebrate Project, Nature Conservancy Council, Plas Gogerddan, Penrhyncoch, Aberystwyth, Dyfed, SY23 3EE

READERS might like to know that the BBC Natural History Unit successfully photographed various aspects of the life history of Meloe beetles this year in Pembrokeshire. These include females ovipositing, larvae ascending plants and waiting for a passing bee as well as the actual transfer to the bee. The sequences will form part of episode 4 of "My Family and Other Animals" shown on Saturday nights at 6:25 BBC 1.

J.C.

FIELD MEETING FOR 1988 - HOW ABOUT NORTH DEVON ?

Is anyone out there planning a field meeting for next year (or meetings - do we need to be restricted to one per year ?). People have dropped hints about various places but nothing concrete. I've already been asked "where are you going to organise one next year" and am prepared to do something but don't want to clash with anyone else's plans. The Heteroptera meeting in North Devon this year was a great success, and I could book Halsannery Field Centre at Bideford again for Coleopterists next year. It was a good bit more expensive than Rowrah Hall in Cumbria, but the facilities there are very impressive. A smallish group can have individual or double rooms with showers and cordon-bleu cookery in a

friendly atmosphere made an "event-type" meal on the Saturday evening unnecessary. The packed lunches were very substantial as well! We paid £16 per night but the cost would have been less if there were more than 10 in the group. There's also a lot of good habitat in the area, ranging from very rich sand-dunes and estuaries, lovely old woodland to high moorland on Dartmoor. How about it? A week? A week-end? Do get in touch if you are interested or if you are already planning a meeting for 1988 - I will see whether or not to go ahead with arrangements.

Roger Key, NCC, Northminster, Peterborough, PE1 1UA
(Tel., 0733 40345 ext 2279).

FREEZING AS A METHOD OF KILLING AND STORING SPECIMENS

OF COLEOPTERA. I had always thought that most entomologists made use of the home freezer for putting off mounting or identifying specimens until the long winter evenings, but recent conversations with other coleopterists reveal that only a minority seem to have thought of the idea. Putting your specimens straight into the freezer overnight is a relatively humane way of dispatching them, particularly for the large species which take so distressingly long in ethyl acetate, a problem otherwise overcome by resorting to boiling water. Their "cold-bloodedness" means that they simply get more and more sluggish as the temperature drops, and are completely torpid by the time ice crystals start forming to deliver the coup de grace.

Experience with some other groups reveals that some surprising species appear to have antifreeze in their blood. Small Parasitica, in particular the Chalcidoidea, can revive after two days in the freezer at -15C. Perhaps there's some useful research to be done here. Bumble-bees

notoriously difficult to dispatch by other means, are fortunately no so hardy. The big disadvantage of a freezing death is that rigor mortis seems to set in immediately the specimens are defrosted, necessitating the usual relaxing period. My own way round this is first to use a quick shot of CO₂ from a "sparklets corkmaster" bottle opener (sadly no longer available owing to their tendency to cause bottles of sparkling wine to explode and their use as offensive weapons, but occasionally still found in junk shops), which anaesthetised the specimens more or less instantly. This is followed by a protracted stay in ethyl acetate (longer than usual when they are anaesthetised, otherwise they come round later on) and finally into the freezer, still in contact with ethyl acetate vapour from a small piece of tissue paper.

The condition of the specimens after prolonged storage depends upon the conditions within the storage tubes. I usually include the whisp of tissue paper moistened with ethyl acetate (above) within a small glass tube (most plastic tubes will dissolve in ethyl acetate) as well as another bit of tissue moist, but not wet, with water to prevent eventual freeze-drying during storage. The ethyl acetate seems to prevent the accumulation of ice crystals within the tube which would otherwise soak the specimens on defrosting, matting pubescence and increasing the likelihood of loss of setae etc. In contrast, Dave Heringway of Wakefield includes a small crystal of silica gel in the tube to absorb sublined water vapour and gets equally good results. Perhaps another idea might be to line the storage tubes with very slightly moistened blotting paper or filter paper. So far I have stored specimens as long as eight years and still found them as good as new when defrosted (giving an idea of the size of my back-log!). Has anyone else any useful tips on this point ?

Roger Key, NCC., Peterborough.

HELP (STILL!) Yet another plea regarding the proposed revision of the Amateur Entomologist's Society's "Coleopterist's Handbook" Work progresses, but these sections do not have an author:

Breeding/rearing beetles

Stored Product beetles

Immature stages

Anyone willing/able to send in any information, please contact J.Cooter, 23 Meyrick Street, Hereford, HR4 ODY

BRITISH RED DATA BOOKS, 2 INSECTS.

Published by the Nature Conservancy Council, 1987

402 +xliv pages (ISBN 0 86139 380 5)

Price £10-00 hardbound. Available from Dept. RDB,
N.C.C., Northminster, Peterborough, PE1 1UA

David Shirt's skillful editing has produced a book which is a complete necessity and will long remain a constant reference source for entomologists, conservationists and biologists in general.

Contents include: Foreward; Introduction; Production of the Red Data Book; A code for insect collecting; Legislation to protect insects; Biological Recording Schemes; Useful addresses; Habitats of Red Data Book insects; Category definitions and Criteria; Summary of species numbers; List of Red Data Book insects; ODONATA; ORTHOPTERA; HETEROPTERA; TRICHOPTERA; LEPIDOPTERA; COLEOPTERA; HYMENOPTERA; DIPTERA; Biography; Index.

The Coleoptera section accounts for pages 109 - 256 making it the longest (and I dare say the most interesting) section in the book.

Each page is packed with information and a proper review would be lengthy indeed. Suffice to say such a major work ought to be in every Coleopterist's possession. J.C.