

NOTES ON THE DISTRIBUTION OF SOME BRITISH HARVESTMEN (OPILIONES)

by D.W.MACKIE.

During a visit to the west of Ireland in late May and early June 1969, Opilionids were collected in the counties of Kerry, Clare and Galway.

As few species of this group are mature at this early season of the year, the number of species was very limited and two species which overwinter as adults were of more frequent occurrence. These two species are Platybunus triangularis (Herbst) and Megabunus diadema (Fabr.). Both these species were found to be generally distributed in Kerry and Clare, but M.diadema was not seen in Co. Galway although it has been recorded from this county (Bristowe, 1949). In the Dingle peninsula of Co. Kerry M.diadema was frequently seen on rock faces at the sides of the Connor Pass, at an altitude of just under 2,000 feet (610 m.) which is a usual habitat for this species. However, it was also noted in much larger concentrations on the yellow marram dunes at sea level in the Inch peninsula, where it could be swept from the grass overhangs along the edges of the eroding dunes in the tangle of grass roots. From my own records of this species in different areas of Great Britain, I have usually found it confined to rock faces or tree trunk habitats, and its occurrence here in the dunes at Inch shows that it can successfully colonise other habitats. Incidentally, all my records of this species fall between the months of May and July, and these records also tend to suggest that this is a western species in this country. The complete list of Opilionids collected in Ireland at this time is as follows:

Co. Kerry Platybunus triangularis (Herbst), Megabunus diadema (Fabr.)
Co. Clare P.triangularis, M.diadema, Nemastoma bimaculatum (Fabr.)
Co. Galway P.triangularis, Phalangium opilio Linn.

Two recent records of another Opilionid, Anelasmaocephalus cambridgei (Westw.) are of interest as they are from counties farther north than those with which this species is usually associated. During spider trapping activities, Mr. B.Sadler took two specimens of A.cambridgei on 7-5-69 and 27-6-69 in a wood, three miles south of Norwich, Norfolk (10 Km.sq. TG 20). Another specimen of the same species was collected by Mr. J.Murphy at Millers Dale, Derbyshire (SK 17) on 28-6-69. This specimen was found under a piece of limestone at the side of the lower road in the Dale, near the river. A.cambridgei has already been recorded for Derbyshire (Bristowe, 1949) but it seems likely that the Norwich specimens will be a new record for Norfolk.

A.cambridgei is usually confined to chalk or limestone grassland and it is possible that further searching will prove that it can survive in our more northern limestone areas.

References.

- BRISTOWE, W.S. 1949: The distribution of Harvestmen (Phalangida) in Great Britain and Ireland. J.Anim.Ecol. 18 : 100-114.
GRUBER, J. & MARTENS, J. 1968: Morphologie, Systematik und Okologie der Gattung Nemastoma C.L.Koch. Senck.biol. 49: 137-172.