

OCULARIUM

No. 2

Newsletter of the Opiliones Recording Scheme

(New Series)

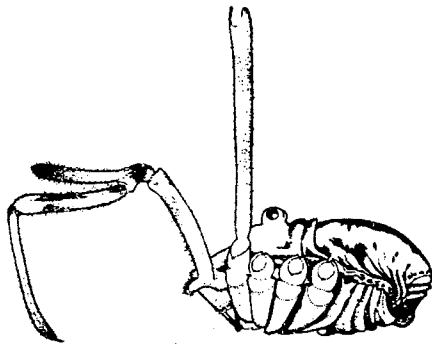
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Editorial Many recorders have remarked that they are happy to see the new *Ocularium*. Good! I hope that it helps to maintain an active community. Now, I need your help to keep the newsletters interesting. Please do try to contribute some news, short articles or simple observations.

SPREAD of *Dicranopalpus ramosus*



The last issue of *Ocularium* referred to the spread of this unmistakable species. Well, judging from recent records, the speed of this harvestman's spread in Britain is quite amazing! Long legs obviously help! We now have two sites that are close on 54°N:

For-ton, nr Lancaster, Lancashire (SD493503) Dr. Will Aston, 17 October 1999, in a garden habitat.

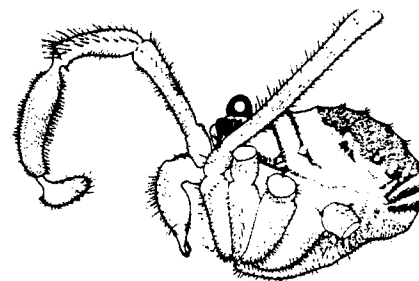
Thorpe Arch, nr Wetherby, Yorkshire (SE44-47-) Dr Jonty Denton, October 1999.

Jonty Denton reported: "It was abundant on a disturbed, scrubby, calcareous part of Thorpe Arch Trading Estate, formerly (in 1941-68) a munitions dump with railway connections to main lines etc." In a separate communication, Paul Whitehead wrote: "It is abundant in the English Midlands. It prefers large hedgerow trees, occurring well up in the crowns, and is frequent in sheltered, damp areas. It seems particularly able to use corridors of woody plants and appears to radiate rapidly along these. Adults are active into the early winter, and this may have been aided by recent climatic trends. Records from Shropshire seem to go back a few years." And according to Wayne Rixom: "A recent visit to the Queenswood area in Herefordshire resulted in countless examples of the species, often to the

exclusion of other species on bushes, trees and even in tall grass in some cases."

Dicranopalpus ramosus was originally described from Morocco in 1909 (as *Dicranochirus ramosus*). The first record from Portugal was in 1948 (as *Dicranopalpus caudatus*); Spain in 1965 (*D. caudatus*); France in 1969 and Britain in 1957 (first record Bournemouth).

STATUS of *Sabacon viscayanum ramblaianum*



The following is an edited extract from: Notes on the ecology and British status of the opilionid *Sabacon viscayanum ramblaianum* by I.K.Morgan (1990), Dyfed Invert. Grp. Newsl. 19: 15-18.

The harvestman *Sabacon viscayanum* subsp. *ramblaianum* Martens was first discovered in the British Isles in September 1980 in woodland at Parkmill, Gower, Glamorgan (Abbot, 1981). By 1990 it was known from 13 localities in the southern half of Wales with a concentration in SE Carmarthenshire. Today, in 1999, it is known from 22 sites in S Wales (27 records) plus one near Presteigne, actually just in England: SO299622 (Wayne Rixom, 1999).

Because the early finds were close to industrial workings, it was suggested (Merret *in* Hillyard and Sankey, 1989) that the harvestman had been introduced to Britain. However, these sites include old, damp woodland which is in fact the usual habitat of *Sabacon*. Martens (1983) considers *S. viscayanum* to be a 'Tertiary relict species', i.e. a taxon whose range was once more extensive but which has since become fragmented. Relict species are considered to be in 'evolutionary decline' and thus it seems unlikely that *S. viscayanum* could establish and thrive after being introduced into Britain. Recent work on the habitat preferences of *S. viscayanum* in S Wales concurs with Abbot: "The species of *Sabacon* are

found in moist, cool habitats, high altitudes or temperate climates. They prefer woodland, especially wet, shaded dingles, and can be found under decaying logs and in leaf litter. They are sometimes found in caves." Thus if *Sabacon* had been introduced into Britain, the means of introduction would have had to maintain the required coolness and high humidity. It is difficult to imagine such a mechanism. More needs to be known about the distribution of *Sabacon* in Britain and Europe. It should perhaps be looked for in SW England and S Eire.

Abbot, R.H.R. 1981. A new opilionid to Great Britain. *Newsl. Br. arachnol. Soc.* 30:4.

Martens, J. 1983. Europäische Arten der Gattung *Sabacon* Simon 1879 (Opiliones: Sabaconidae). *Senckenberg Biol.* 63: 265-296.

MASS AGGREGATIONS of HARVESTMEN

Has anyone seen any aggregations lately?

J.G. Wood wrote: "One day this summer (1862), as I was bathing in the river Cray, just below a lasher, I happened to look under the cross-beam of the woodwork, and there saw something which I took for a mass of black horsehair. Wondering how such a substance could get into such a situation, I went to examine it and then found that the supposed horsehair was nothing more or less than a legion of harvest-spiders, all gathered together, their little bodies nearly hidden by bent legs. There must have been some thousands of the creatures under the beam, all perfectly motionless." [probably *leiobunids* - ed.]

It is most probable that aggregations form because the combined action of many opilionids' stink glands repels predators more effectively than one individual's effort. Vertical surfaces and protected spaces are the preferred sites for this group behaviour. For example, in Mexico, aggregations form in the branches of the candelabra cacti. A paper by Holmberg *et al.* (1984) on overwintering *Leiobunum paessleri*, in Canadian caves and mines, distinguished two types of aggregations: "loose" and "dense". In "loose" aggregations, the bodies of the opilionids were orientated in different directions with the legs outstretched or flexed. In "dense" aggregations, consisting of several layers of densely-packed opilionids, mostly with legs hanging straight down, the individuals in the innermost layer clung on to the substrate by the claws of their pedipalps or chelicerae. At the same time, the outermost layers clung on to the bodies of the innermost (like on the London Underground!).

Holmberg, R. G., Angerilli, N.F.D., and LaCasse, L.J. 1984. Overwintering aggregations of *Leiobunum paessleri* in caves and mines (Arachnida, Opiliones). *J. Arachnol.*, 12:195-204.

Wood, J.G. 1863. *The Illustrated Natural History*. Routledge & Sons, London, page 677.

BBC HARVEST FESTIVAL

Harvestmen were described for the uninitiated in an

article in the October 1999 issue of BBC Wildlife Magazine. The article can be read at the website: www.bbc.co.uk/animalzone.

NEW PUBLICATIONS

1. A paper by Peter Harvey entitled: *The modern distribution of harvestmen (Arachnida; Opiliones) in Essex with their regional rarity and threat status*, has just been published in *Essex Naturalist* no. 16 (New series), pp. 125-144. Distribution maps and detailed species accounts are provided for each species. Copies of *Essex Naturalist* 16 with 8 colour plate pages are available at 10 pounds plus 1 pound p & p per copy from the Publications Sales Officer, Essex Field Club, 40 Pentland Avenue, Chelmsford, Essex CM1 4AZ.

2. *The Source Book for Biological Recording in Scotland* is now published. Although aimed at Scotland, much of the information is relevant UK wide. Sections cover: (1) principles and techniques of recording; (2) details of all the national recording schemes; and (3) Scottish priority species and habitats. To obtain a copy, send a cheque for £10, payable to BRISC, to Anne-Marie Smout, Chesterhill, Shore Road, Anstruther, KY10 3DZ.

3. A detailed account entitled: *The Harvestmen (Arachnida: Opiliones) of Gloucestershire* by Keith Alexander is in preparation for the *Gloucestershire Naturalist* next year. It will contain many records that are new to the recording scheme.

RECORD CARDS SUBMITTED

Many thanks to the following recorders for submitting records last year: Adrian Colston, A.E. Cooper, S.J.Gregory, J. E. Milner, I.K.Morgan, and T.J.Thomas.

OTHER ITEMS

HARVESTMEN (1989) Synopses of the British Fauna No. 4 (2nd ed) by Hillyard & Sankey. Copies available from the editor (address above) at the discounted price of £15 (inc. post & packing).

WEBSITE for the Opiliones Recording Scheme is to be found on the British Arachnological Society's internet pages: www.salticus.demon.co.uk

WEBSITE for the National Biodiversity Network is to be found at: www.nbn.org.uk

OCULARIUM No. 3 will be published in Nov 2000. Contributions received before then will be more than welcome.

LATE NEWS

Specimen received from Peter Harvey, collected at Banbury Reservoir, Lea Valley, belongs to a species of *Opilio* new to Britain. Full account next issue.