

ORTHOPTERA RECORDING SCHEME

Newsletter No. 8 - Spring 1982

The Final Atlas, 1984-5

There should be sufficient data available to justify the publication of a definitive Atlas in 1984-5. This atlas will include distribution maps for all native species of Orthoptera, Dictyoptera and Dermaptera, plus long established aliens such as house cricket (*Acheta domestica* L.) and the two New Zealand phasmids, *Acanthoxyla prasina* (Westwood) and *Clitarchus hookeri* (White).

Because of continued habitat destruction, coupled with a possible climatic deterioration, particularly in the last five years, it has become clear that records made in the early 1960s no longer apply to several less common species. It has therefore been decided that it would be better to make use of the efforts of the one hundred and thirty recorders who have contributed to the scheme during the post-1960 period by publishing a definitive atlas as soon as practicable, rather than to continue with an indefinite sequence of provisional atlases. The maps in the definitive atlas will probably show distributions separated to those before 1970 and those after 1970.

Newsletters

It should be possible to continue to produce newsletters each year until the publication of the definitive atlas. Thereafter, possibly at about five-yearly intervals, in order to keep Orthopterists informed of the changes in the post-1985 period, provided that there is sufficient support for the idea. Please let me have your views on this matter.

For action this year!

Seriously underworked regions were highlighted in last year's Newsletter No. 7. Unfortunately the response was negligible, at least up to February 1982. Before a final atlas is produced it is really necessary that most of the 10 km. squares in the North Hampshire (41, SU), Berkshire, south Oxfordshire (42, SP) areas be surveyed in some detail. A glance at the maps for the dark bush-cricket (5), or field grasshopper (27) clearly indicate this need.

Other important areas which really ought to be covered are Cheshire, virtually unrecorded in the post-1960 period, and in Scotland, the greater part of the 100 km. square 26 (NS) including the Glasgow area; the Lothians (36, NT) and Orkney (HY). The most important under-recorded 100 km. square in Ireland is probably 11, Limerick and the Shannon, but a late summer visit to the Burren area also is necessary. Botanists and Lepidopterists flock to the Burren in early summer, but just one or two Orthopterists there in August-September might make entomological history if post-war discoveries in Lepidoptera on the Burren are anything to go by.

## France

A national recording scheme for French Orthoptera is well under way and any help from Orthopterists from this country would be welcomed. According to Dr J F Voisin, data is particularly needed from Aquitaine (S.W. France, north of the Pyrenees); Normandy and Artois - all extensive districts which are right across the routes we often take when on holiday in France and ideally placed for British motoring Orthopterists. Anyone interested in helping should contact me or Dr J F Voisin, École Normale Supérieure, Laboratoire de Zoologie, 46, Rue d'Ulm, 75230 Paris Cedex 05. Fear not! His English is excellent!

## Profiles

### 2. Woodland Grasshopper, Omocestus rufipes (Zett.)

This very attractive grasshopper, so widespread on the Continent, is obviously on the edge of its natural range in southern England, where it nevertheless has an interesting distribution. Until the 1950s there would appear to have been little clear idea of the true distribution of the woodland grasshopper in Britain. The eminent Orthopterist, Malcolm Burr, was still suggesting, in his British Grasshoppers and Their Allies, London, 1936 that the species occurred in northern England (Lincolnshire, Yorkshire and Cumberland) and that "It occurs probably also in Scotland and Ireland". It has been further suggested also that the species could be confused with its close and (in Britain) far more widespread relative the common green grasshopper, O. viridulus (L.). True, their stridulation is somewhat similar - although to the practised ear, distinguishable in the field, but in appearance they bear about as much resemblance to each other as, say, the two "cousin" butterflies Red admiral, Vanessa atalanta L., and Painted lady, Cynthia cardui L. No other native grasshopper has the combination of chalk-white tips to the palps, scarlet on the abdomen and plain, un-clubbed antennae. There is indeed only one colour variation in the woodland grasshopper - the females alone may be dark green or dark brown on the upper side. The smaller males are always very dark brown to black, but at close range their scarlet-tipped, white and black-banded abdomens and prominent white palps create a very colourful, Red admiral-like effect. The common green grasshopper on the other hand may be overall straw-brown or grass-green, and the females sometimes plum-purple, but there is never scarlet on the abdomen while the palps are light brown. It seems therefore that pre-1940 Orthoptera records were often made without proper scrutiny of specimens, for there can be no real excuse for confusing these insects in the adult stage. B C Pickard, in 1956, appears to have been one of the first Orthopterists to discredit all northern records of woodland grasshoppers - a judgement subsequently upheld by our present survey.

In the post-1960 period the species has been found in two inter-related habitats. Its original habitat in Britain is probably scrubby heathland and the warm southern margins of heathy woodland. In such places it is widespread but usually thinly distributed along the length of England south of the Thames, from West Cornwall to East Kent. Extensive areas of treeless heathland seem to be unsuitable, for it is very local in Dorset, yet common in the almost adjacent New Forest.

From about the middle of the last century much southerly heathland was planted with conifers. The wider rides, patches of unplanted scrub and the southern edges of the plantations - often with convenient warm slopes and banks - may well have provided the woodland grasshopper with a more favourable habitat, for it is now locally common in warmer woodland or plantations in much of Hampshire, Surrey, West Sussex and East Kent. It flourishes in newly cleared

sites and becomes scarcer as the canopy closes, but in such plantation-woodlands as the Rewell Wood near Arundel in West Sussex or Kings Wood near Barham in East Kent, the grasshopper appears to be well adapted to the slowly changing cover and its numbers build up quickly wherever the opportunity occurs. Its two main strongholds in England appear to be the New Forest and the woodlands and fragmented heathlands of West Sussex. It is very scarce north of the Thames with only one or two stations located in the Chilterns; a single known colony in Essex and a single pre-1960 site in South Wales. It has so far not been found in the otherwise Orthoptera-rich Cotswolds or in the rolling heathy woodlands of Herefordshire, which include much apparently suitable terrain; while in Devon and Cornwall it is a very local species of scrubby lowland heathland rather than woodland.

### Localities

#### 2. The Lizard

The most southerly part of the British mainland, the Lizard (comprising 10 km. squares 10/61 and 10/71) is famous for the remarkable flora that flourishes in the Serpentine rock and adjacent schists. The overall flora is that of damp heathland and scrub. In the middle of this unique area is now the prominent satellite tracking station, while "prairie-busters" have spear-headed some forestry and grant-aided arable farming into good tracts of the heath, but fortunately much of the best terrain is protected by nature reserves and National Trust properties.

Orthoptera recorded during the last five years (post-1976) include great green, dark, grey and speckled bush-crickets, but there have never been records of the oak or bog bush-crickets, although the latter might be anticipated: there is certainly purple moor-grass amongst the Cornish heath. Grasshoppers recorded during the last five years include woodland, mottled, common field and meadow grasshoppers. There have never been records for the common green grasshopper, although it occurs elsewhere in the extreme west of Cornwall. Neither stripe-winged nor rufous-grasshoppers have been found on the Lizard, but there is a slender chance that either or both may yet be located, as they occur on Serpentine elsewhere in Cornwall. All three groundhoppers on the British list occur, as well as common earwig. Lesser cockroach is listed for the pre-1960 era. It is unobtrusive and usually requires a special search, so could well be refound. It is certainly present on the Scillies and in the Lands End area.

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AN IMPORTANT NOTE FROM THE BIOLOGICAL RECORDS CENTRE

I am pleased to announce that the Nature Conservancy Council has agreed to continue its financial support for the work of the Biological Records Centre over the next three years. At the special request of NCC, part of the work to be undertaken in this contract will be to provide information on what species of plants and animals have been recorded on statutory conservation sites (National Nature Reserves, Local Nature Reserves and Sites of Special Scientific Interest). Most of the sorting of this information will be done using the computer at Monks Wood. However, it would help us at BRC if recorders could modify the way they complete recording cards as follows:

1. Wherever possible give a full 8-figure grid reference (e.g. 52/195795).
2. Always try to give a place or site name. If it is a small site also give a locality which can be found on Ordnance Survey maps (e.g. Monks Wood, Abbots Ripton).
3. If you know that you are recording on a statutory conservation site, note this, with the site name, in the "locality" box (e.g. Monks Wood NNR, Abbots Ripton).

With this information it will, in future, be much easier for us to attribute records to statutory conservation sites, even when the recorder was unaware that he was on such a site.

Continue to send your records to your Scheme Organiser in the usual way.  
Thank you.

Paul T Harding

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