

ORTHOPTERA RECORDING SCHEME

Newsletter No. 9 - Summer 1983

A new book on Orthoptera in the British Isles

Dr Valerie Brown's book "Grasshoppers" (Naturalists' Handbook No. 2) has just been published by Cambridge University Press (Hardback £8.00, Soft £3.50).

At first glance the book may seem to offer very few pages for its price - but every page and paragraph is packed with useful information - beamed at serious students of entomology and good value for any amateur entomologist with a genuine enthusiasm for our native Orthoptera. Valerie Brown has contributed the following notes about her book:

"This is one of a new series of Naturalists' Handbooks; the first few are now published by Cambridge University Press. The aim of the Handbooks is to take selected groups of British insects or the insects associated with a particular host plant and to draw attention to regions on the frontiers of current knowledge where amateur studies have much to offer.

The Orthoptera book includes a simple-to-use and fully illustrated key to Grasshoppers and Bush-Crickets. Colour plates and a number of thumb-nail sketches enable the key to be used by sixth formers and others without a specialist knowledge of the Orthoptera. Emphasis is placed on the varied biology and ecology of Grasshoppers and Bush-Crickets and the book includes chapters on life history and reproductive strategies, habits and behaviour and distribution and habitat preference. There is also a chapter describing some techniques relevant to the study of Orthoptera.

The apparent anomaly between the title and the colour plates of Bush Crickets on the cover is, I am told, a publishers' way of saying that both groups are included in the book!"

Progress in 1982

A number of important new finds and records have been sent in since the last (Spring '82) Newsletter.

Earwigs: Jervis C. Good has produced a major paper on the Common Earwig in Ireland (Irish Naturalist's Journal Vol. 20 No. 11, 1982). Part 1 covers the known distribution of this presumably ubiquitous insect in Ireland. His paper provides me with the first opportunity to make 10 km record dots on the Irish map, and is an excellent example of what the work of even a single enthusiast can do to clarify the known distribution of a species - in this case in an entire country!

Even the 10 km map of the common earwig in Britain is still full of enormous gaps. I really would welcome any records of the common earwig, if only from readers' gardens. Please give date, locality, and six-figure reference if possible.

Orthoptera:

Meconema thalassinum (De Geer), Oak Bush-Cricket. The most northerly post-1960 record so far; Arnside 3.10.1982, 34(SD)/443765 by P. Jepson, per D.S. Bunn.

Decticus verrucivorus (L.), Wart-biter. Found again September 1982 in the same area of heathland south of Wareham, Dorset where it had been located the previous year (August '81) by A. Bundy. The site is about one kilometre N.E. of David Ragge's 1955 locality, indicating that the species may be distributed over a considerable area of Dorset heathland but perhaps present only in certain places in any given years.

It is also possible that a well-known coleopterist, Peter Hodge, may have seen an adult wart-biter in the Isle of Wight in 1980, in rough, cliff-top vegetation between Ventnor and Steephill in the square 40(SZ)/55-77-. If anyone is able to check on this possible record, please remember that it is now illegal to collect the species, but in this case a convincing sight record (backed if possible with a colour slide) would be quite acceptable. Confirmation of Peter Hodge's reported sighting would be a very important additional post-1960 location.

Metrioptera roeselii (Hagenbach), Roesel's Bush-Cricket in Berkshire. By Roy Williams at Cox Green, near Maidenhead, 41(SU)/859795. And in E. Kent, 61(TR)/0549/0550 by M. Enfield (per Eric Philp), Godmersham Downs, on the west side of the Stour Valley. Both records indicate a considerable recent extension in the known range of this insect in S.E. England and suggest that it is perhaps able to spread freely along main railway and road verges.

Stethophyma grossum (L.), Large Marsh Grasshopper in Surrey. Continues to thrive at Thursley N.N.R. where it was introduced, but has now been discovered by T. Price in boggy heathland on War Department land near the Bisley Ranges.

Tetrix subulata (L.), Slender Groundhopper. Denbigh, 33(SJ)/335407 and 322403, May 1983, in the floodplain and on a river bank of the Dee, by Ian Wallace. This is a completely new locality and a most important extension of its known British distribution.

Profile

3. The Mole Cricket, Gryllotalpa gryllotalpa L.

This remarkable and unmistakable insect has proved to be the most elusive of native British orthopteroids during the survey period. All but two of the post-1960 sightings of the Mole Cricket in natural surroundings have been of singletons, the majority of these few records being made by non-orthopterists. The post-1960 records received so far are:

Dorset: 1979. Singleton in garden at Ferndown.

Isle of Wight: 1976 (Autumn). Singleton in garden at Norton Green near Yarmouth.

Hampshire: 1970. Small colony (?) near Romsey.

- Wiltshire: 1966-69. Colony on private land at the northern edge of the New Forest near Landford.
- East Sussex: 1964 (Summer). Singleton in a garden at Uckfield.
1976 (August). Singleton in grounds of Buxsted Park, near Uckfield.
- Cheshire: 1963 (August). Singleton at Hyde.
- Northants: 1973 (Autumn). Singleton found in an allotment garden at Sudborough near Kettering.
- S. Yorks.: 1965. Singleton at Grenoside near Sheffield.

There is too little evidence to indicate the exact status of the mole cricket in Britain at the present time. It was obviously once a locally familiar insect in certain districts, because of its evocative common names - "Eve-churr", "Jar-worm", etc. It has clearly been a victim of land drainage, but the scattered post-1960 sightings, including in the North Midlands, indicate that it hangs on as a native insect even if in very low numbers. It is conceivable, although there is no supporting evidence, that it may be reduced to tiny colonies of perhaps only parthenogenetic females. If this were the case it could indeed remain almost undetectable except by chance sightings. It may well be that stridulating males are now extremely rare. One field point from David Ragge is that in the colony he has investigated near Landford, specimens were most easily located under turves and mounds of soil heaped up from recent ditch clearances. If anyone is prepared to search for the insect it is of course important to remember that it is now illegal to collect specimens from the wild in Britain. What is needed is the report of a positive sighting, photograph if possible and detailed account of the habitat. I will be only too glad to send fuller details if necessary to anyone prepared to undertake a special search.

Localities

3. East Devon

The coastal margin and hinterland of East Devon from Berry Head (20/90) eastwards to Beer Head (30/80) includes spectacular sea cliffs, sand dunes, plus estuarine salt marshes and reed beds; damp and dry lowland heath; old broad-leaf woodland and, at the extreme eastern end, even a small area of chalk turf on the cliffs at Beer Head. The climate is generally winter-mild, relatively dry for the West Country and notably sunny. With plenty of varied habitat and a good sunshine record, it is not surprising that the region supports a high proportion of native orthopteroids and an interesting, long-established New Zealand phasmid. The region has been surveyed in detail in the post-1970 period, particularly by Roy Williams, who lives in the Paignton area, and all species listed for East Devon have now been re-found during the last three years. Noteworthy species include:

Phasmida

Prickly stick insect, Acanthoxyla prasina (Westwood). Williams confirms that it still flourishes in the Paignton area and in at least one locality a mile or two to the south. It now appears to be well dispersed. In the wild it is most often seen on

cupressus-type conifers and these presumably provide it with the necessary shelter and micro-climate for survival over winter when adults are observed. Its life cycle in Britain has not yet been determined. It is not an easy species to rear in captivity, particularly as the nymphs are apt to die in their second moult.

Dictyoptera

Lesser cockroach, Ectobius panzeri Stephens, is present in several sites, under low vegetation on coastal cliffs, as well as on East Budleigh Common inland. The Dusky Cockroach, E. lapponicus (L.), has been recorded in the post-1960 period from heathy woodland sites at Harpford and on chalk near Beer.

Orthoptera

Grey Bush-Cricket, Platycleis albopunctata f. falcata (Zetterstedt) has been refound recently on several sea cliffs between Start Point and Teignmouth; the pre-1961 records on the distribution map were simply for want of re-checking.

Bog Bush-Cricket, Metrioptera brachyptera (L.) is present both on the heaths north of Budleigh Salterton and in the Heathfield area around Chudleigh Knighton and also on Dunscombe Cliff near Sidmouth, while the Rufous Grasshopper, Gomphocerippus rufus (L.) has been located on the undercliff at Dunscombe - its most westerly station on the Channel coast. The Wood Cricket, Nemobius sylvestris (Bosca) is still present in several areas of heathy woodland both around Harpford and East Budleigh Common and west of Exeter in Meadhaydown Wood. Short-winged cone-head, Conocephalus dorsalis (Latreille) is now known to be present in all the major estuaries of East Devon. Williams discovered a flourishing population of the Lesser Marsh Grasshopper Chorthippus albomarginatus (De Geer) in water meadows by the Exe near Exeter in 1982. This is the only existing colony known in Devon despite much apparently suitable terrain.

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