

ORTHOPTERA RECORDING SCHEME
Newsletter No. 7 - Spring 1981

DATA HANDLING AT BRC:

Almost all the records received since the beginning of the scheme in 1968, up to the end of 1980 have now been checked, edited and prepared for putting into the computer at the Biological Records Centre. Once the data are in, and have been fully checked, it will be possible to produce draft revised distribution maps. These maps will not be published; Chris Haes will have a set, as will BRC, but it may be possible in future newsletters to include one or two updated maps. A "final" atlas of distribution maps will be published in a few years. The original record cards are now filed at BRC and microfilm copies have been made.

It has been possible to code most of the habitat information supplied with records. This will enable us to investigate the potential of recording and analysing habitat information. More habitat details are needed with records and more precision over grid references (not just a 10 km. square reference) and dates (please, no more date spans such as 1940-1979) is needed if the data are going to be of use in monitoring changes in our Orthoptera fauna caused, for example, by loss of habitat.

Some of the data accumulated by the scheme have not yet been put into the computer. These are mainly old published records which will be very useful when we come to look at changes in distributions. Help is needed with abstracting information from journals and books. Anyone who feels they may be able to help in some way is asked to contact Chris Haes or Paul Harding. At present most of the records abstracted from the literature are not in a form that can be used and no systematic effort to abstract records seems to have been made.

Paul T Harding
Biological Records Centre

PROGRESS:

Ireland: A valuable contribution by D C F Cotton, (1980, Bull. Irish Biogeog. Soc. 4: 13-22) has virtually doubled the number of recent Irish Orthoptera records.

National Trust properties: Another most useful source of records is Keith Alexander's insect survey of National Trust properties, starting in S W England. Many useful species gaps have been filled by this survey during the last two seasons.

East Hampshire-Berkshire: In contrast, little progress has been made to fill what is now a reproachful blank on the maps of all our most widespread and common species. Please, can anyone in a position to assist make an all-out effort this year to record in what may be conveniently called the Winchester-Wantage gap? The following is a list of badly under-recorded or even quite unrecorded 10 km. squares in the Gap, with names of conveniently located centres on main roads within each. Records of Orthoptera, Dictyoptera or Dermaptera from any of these squares would be very welcome:

- 41/43 Sutton Scotney (A30) and Winchester (north side);
- 41/24 Grateley and Beacon Hill;
- 41/34 Andover;

41/54 M3-A30 junction;
41/64 Herriard (A339);
41/25 Collingbourne Kingston (A338);
41/55 Kingsclere (A339);
41/65 Sherfield on Loddon (A33);
41/36 Shalbourne (A338) and Hungerford (A338);
41/07 Cherhill (A4) and Lyneham (A420) - this square includes the famous Windmill Hill Neolithic camp;
41/27 Albourne (A419);
41/37 Lambourn;
41/47 Chieveley (A34);
41/08 Wootton Bassett (A420);
41/18 Swindon;
41/38 East Challow and Wantage (A417);
41/48 Wantage and Harwell (A417);
41/09 Ashton Keynes;
41/29 Lechlade (A361) and Baringdon (A420);
41/39 Buckland (A420).

Scotland: There are no post 1960 Orthoptera records from the Isle of Arran. The 100 km. squares 26 (NS) Ayrshire, Glasgow and Lanark) and 36 (NT) (Lothians and Berwick) have very few recent records: any records from these areas would be very welcome.

PROFILES:

In the next few newsletters it is intended to provide notes on the distributions of some of the less common native species, followed by a series on notable localities for Orthoptera.

1. Wart-biter, Decticus verrucivorus (L.)

In Britain this impressively large bush-cricket is known from two distinct habitats. The Dorset and New Forest colonies are (or once were) on warm heathland. All the other known colonies - in E. Kent, Sussex, I.O.W. and Wiltshire are in coarser herbage on southerly-facing chalk downland. The recent Bedfordshire record from the environs of a factory is at present thought perhaps to have been an accidental introduction with goods from Scandinavia. The known colonies are:

E. Kent

Lyddon, Kent Trust N.R. Possibly reduced to very low level by removal of coarse grass and herbage to encourage downland butterflies and choicer chalk plants. First found in the area in 1907, lost after 1921 and re-found 1968. Last reported sighting 1975.

St Margaret's Bay to Deal area. First reported 1889 (Deal) and 1886, 1889 and 1900 (St Margaret's Bay). Last reported in the area 1942. Not seen since, but there is still apparently suitable terrain along the cliffs.

Rochester: A well known colony near the town had been built over by about 1830. It has never been re-found there.

E. Sussex

Deep Coomb, Lullington. Just north of Lullington Heath N.N.R. A small colony seems to exist here but it has proved very elusive. Seen 1973 (one stridulating male) and 1977, a female. There is a large colony of Conocephalus discolor (Thunberg) in the area indicating the site is particularly favourable for Orthoptera.

Kingston-near-Lewes. A small colony exists along the face of the Downs above the village. First seen during the Second World War; the colony was re-found and first recorded in 1955. In spite of heavy cattle trampling and deliberate burning of part of the terrain in high summer, this diffuse colony has persisted and several males were stridulating in August, 1980.

Castle Hill N.N.R. A very extensive and strong colony covers much of this important nature reserve. First reported here 1967. Found to be very numerous in 1969. Even in poor summers it has always been possible to locate specimens. Several males were stridulating in August 1980.

Shave's Wood near Henfield. The only sighting was of a female in September 1969. One or two males have been heard stridulating - the last time in August 1973. Until 1967 there was quite extensive ancient heathy pasture land on this clay-soil area, but nearly the whole site has now been converted to conifer plantations.

Wiltshire

Near Cherhill. Substantial colony in a downland N.R. First located 1971. Colony still flourishing 1978, and presumably to date.

Hampshire

New Forest. During the 19th century the wart-biter was found in several places in the forest. The main colony was at Godwincroft inland from Christchurch, where the insect was first reported in 1818. Brown specimens seem to have been predominant in the colony. The presumed site has been partly quarried for sand and partly built over, but suitable heathland still exists nearby. The last date on which specimens were seen at Godwincroft apparently is not recorded, but isolated individuals were taken in unspecified areas in the forest in 1844 and 1891. There is still a great deal of apparently suitable terrain for the wart-biter in the New Forest.

Isle of Wight. Only a single female found in 1951, probably in the Ventnor area. There is still much rough chalk grassland here which is apparently suitable.

Dorset

The species occurs at very low density on heathland between Wareham and Corfe Castle, over what is also good terrain for the heath grasshopper, Chorthippus vagans (Eversman). Single wart-biters were found near Corfe Castle 1923 and on Sleppe Heath 1927. A small colony was located more or less between these points, by the A351 in 1955. It has persisted in this area at least until 1975 and the insects are probably still in this vicinity, although not detected in the last few years.

Despite its size the wart-biter is a curiously elusive insect, and small colonies are surprisingly difficult to locate without very careful searching. For this reason it seems worth continuing to check for its presence in any extensive downland coomb or sheltered heathland south of the Thames. A good time to search is in warm weather in late May-early June when the dark-eyed nymphs are easily "walked up" from coarse herbage. Even in the first and second instars they are quite unmistakable in appearance. Similar sized Tettigonia nymphs always have green eyes and are never mottled.

LOCALITIES:

1. The Scilly Isles

The Scilly Isles were separated from mainland Britain relatively early, thus the four recorded native species of Orthoptera now present may well have been amongst the earliest post-glacial arrivals to what was to become the British Isles. For much of recorded history the islands were treeless and fully exposed to the strong Atlantic winds, but they have always enjoyed reasonable sunshine and an almost sub-tropical mildness. The field grasshopper is abundant on all but the smaller islands and the great green bush-cricket occurs commonly on the larger islands. The grey bush-cricket is known from sand dunes on Breyher and common ground-hopper from Tresco. The now well sheltered Abbey Gardens on Tresco also support colonies of the prickly and smooth stick insects, accidentally introduced from New Zealand early in this century. Perhaps a careful search would reveal further, less obvious, New Zealand insects or other invertebrates. Lepidoptera have been well studied, but other groups might well justify thorough investigation. Hopefully additional Orthoptera species could yet be found.

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