NEWS LETTER OF THE ISOPOD SURVEY SCHEME

No. 2 November 1969

PLEASE KEEP THIS FOR FUTURE REFERENCE

In this, the second issue of the Newsletter, we will give you the latest information about the scheme and continue with some regular features.

1. PROGRESS OF THE SCHEME.

The recruitment of recorders for the scheme is continuing satisfactorily and completed record cards are now arriving in quantity. Some very interesting records have been received already and our knowledge of distributions is rapidly expanding.

2. PUBLICITY.

Mr. L. Christie has kindly circulated an appeal for recorders, and the Yorkshire Post published a couple of articles on the scheme having learned of it through the Yorkshire Naturalist Union Newsletter. An indirect result of this latter publicity was the discovery in a greenhouse at Mirfield near Leeds of *Porcellio dilatatus*. This species has been recorded very infrequently from the county.*

3. COVERAGE.

Collections have been made recently in Sutherland and Perth. Further South there remains a large area of the country unworked including most of Wales.

4. FINANCES.

No further grants have been received but several possibilities are being pursued. We would welcome suggestions of possible sources since funds are needed to enable the scheme to be truly effective.

5. REVISION OF THE RECORD CARD.

The Biological Records Centre of the Nature Conservancy have always been keen that our card should conform as closely as possible to the format of their standard recording card. In an attempt to conform as closely as possible and simultaneously to improve the effectiveness of our card, a new version has been drafted, the essential features of which are:-

(i) Marine species are omitted - a new card is being produced, covering them, By Dr. David Holdich of Nottingham University in conjunction with B R.C.

(ii) The B.R.C. format for details of collector and locality is followed.

(iii) The present system of recording on the Habitat side of the card is retained but the system is rationalised and the number of entries greatly increased. It is hoped thereby that a much more accurate description of habitats will be possible. Code numbers will be added to aid the transfer of data onto punched cards and/or tape.

The new card will not be ready for some time and it is vital that recorders continue to **use the old cards until the new ones are made available**. The new card will be easier to use than the original version but may tax recorders' powers of observation since a great deal of information is required

* *P. dilatatus* is first recorded as having been found in Yorkshire in 1909 (Rhodes 1916). Rhodes goes on to say that '(he has) found this species in very many greenhouses around Bradford, but very seldom in the open country.' Ref. The Naturalist (1916) p. 121.

6. HABITATS - 2

COLLECTING ON WALLS.

Walls made of stone and the various types of brick can harbour large populations of woodlice. Even a smooth well pointed wallcan prove, at night, to have a number of animals moving up from sheltering areas at the base of the wall to feed on *Pleurococoids* (single celled encrusting green algae) or to indulge in other open air activities. In damp places and low down on walls *Oniscus asellus* is found, while higher up *Porcellio scaber* *occurs mainly in limestone areas and appears to be characteristic of walls, usually being abundant where it occurs, particularly so if the old matrix (mortar or cement) has deteriorated giving deep crevices. This species also occurs on dry stone walls in limestone country, but it is not known to what extent this is so. A heavy growth of moss or ivy on a wall increases the amount of shelter available and high densities of *P. scaber* occur but *O. asellus* is infrequent and we have no records of a *Trichoniscid* in such a situation. The aspect of a wall is important with *P. spinicornis* occuring on the hottest and driest areas and *P. scaber* occuring elsewhere with only a slight overlap between them. Walls shaded by trees or hedges and therefore green with *Pleurococoids* will probably yield *O. asellus*.

It is always advisable to examine walls by night since rarely is anything visible during daylight, especially on sunny days. It is necessary to determine whether the stone used in a wall is limestone or not, whether the matrix is mortar or cement and the zonation by height of the various species found.

* Both *O. asellus* and *P. scaber* have been recorded walking quite freely on top of a 4ft. pointed wall on two occasions at 8p.m. on early summer evenings.

7. NOTES ON SPECIES

Porcellio scaber

Much difficulty has been experienced by people in identifying *P. scaber* from Edney's key in which much emphasis is placed on the head shape - unfortunately a rather variable character. The telson shape is more constantly reliable.

Other useful features:

(i) *P. scaber* is much more heavily tuberculate than any other *Porcellio* species, particularly on the posterior half of the dorsal surface and it is the only *Porcellio* species to have obvious crenellations on the rear adge of the pleonites when viewed with a hand lens. The heavy tuberculation is easily visible, with good light, to the naked eye.

(ii) No other terrestial isopod has the same slaty blue colour, the nearest being *P. laevis* which is not tuberculate. Moreover young *scaber* (and some adults particularly near the sea and on dry heaths) have complex patterns of dark blotches or yellow or brick red backgrounds. These blotchy patterns are never arranged to form longitudinal stripes so characteristic of most other *Porcellio* species.

(iii) The body is narrower than in other tuberculate isopods.

(iv) Very often the elbow of the base of the antenna (morphologically the second antennal segment) is an orange colour even when the animal is the normal slate blue colour.

8. SPECIES OF INTEREST

Trichoniscoides saeroeensis Lohmander.

Dr. Edith Sheppard (Dept. of Zoology, University College of Cardiff) has kindly allowed us to examine a specimen of this species which she identified from material collected by members of the Cave Research Group at Goughs Cave in the Mendips. This is a species new to Britain, being known from Denmark, Sweden and France. It is described by Vandel in Vol. I (pp. 252-4) of the *Faune de France* key as being a littoral or sea shore species!

Eurydice affinis

Drs. D.A.Jones and E. Naylor of the University College of Swansea record this species in Journal of the Marine Biological Association 47:373-382 (1967) as new to the British Isles. It closely resembles *E. pulchra* with which it occurs in the Cornish Peninsula and South Wales Coast, but it is much less heavily pigmented (see description in above paper). Both species swim actively in surf on the incoming tide where they are easily netted.

Haplophthalmus mengei

Recorders are asked particularly to look for this species since there appear to be only three recent records of it.

9. PSEUDOTRACHEAE

It should be noted that these are extremely difficult to see in animals once they have been put into alcohol, although they are obvious as bright white patches in living animals. It follows that the presence of *pseudotracheae* should be checked and noted before a specimen is put into alcohol. This would be helpful even if the material is being sent to us for identification.