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NOTES ON THE ORTHOPTERA OF THE MALTESE ISLANDS: THE GENUS *MYRMECOPHILUS* (ORTHOPTERA: GRYLLIDAE)

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ABSTRACT

Two species of *Myrmecophilus* have been recorded from the Maltese Islands: *M. ochraceus* and the endemic *M. baronii*. New distribution data for both species are given. This is the first time that *M. baronii* has been collected again after its original description by Baccetti in 1967. A key to the Malteses species is included.

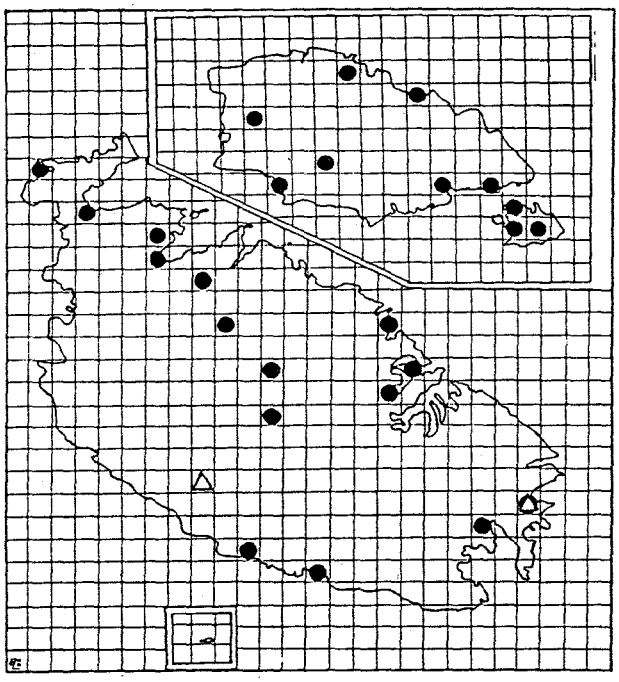

Fig. 1. Map showing distribution of *Myrmecophillus* species in the Maltese Islands: *Myrmecophilus ochraceus* (●); *Myrmecophilus baronii* (△).

The ant-associated genus *Myrmecophilus* Berthold is represented in the Maltese Islands (Central Mediterranean) by two species: *Myrmecophilus ochraceus* Fischer and *Myrmecophilus baronii* Baccetti. The only source of information on the Maltese species remains Baccetti's revision of Italian species of *Myrmecophilus* published over 17 years ago (BACCETTI, 1966). Since then new data have become available and it is the aim of this note to record these new findings. New distribution data for *M. ochraceus* is given, while the presence of *M. baronii* is confirmed; this latter being the second published record of the species.

MYRMECOPHILUS (MYRMECOPHILINA) OCHRACEUS FISCHER, 1953

MALTA: Għajn Riħana, Għar Lapsi, Gwardamanġia, Lija, Manoel Island, Marsaxlokk, Mellieħa, Mistra, Paradise Bay, Spinola, St. Paul's Bay, St. Thomas Bay, Wied Babu, Wied Qannotta, Wied is-Sewda.

GOZO: Ħondoq ir-Rummien, Mġarr, Ramla, Qbajjar, San Lawrenz, Victoria, Xlendi.

COMINO: Central area, near Tower, San Niklaw.

Associated with the ants: *Messor structor* (Latr.) 3%; *Messor capitatus* (Latr.) 60.6%; *Pheidole pallidula* (Nyl.) 3%; *Monomorium subopacum* (Smith) 15.2%; *Tetramorium caespitum* (L.) 18.2%. Figures are percent occurrence with each ant species (total sample = 33).

Myrmecophilus ochraceus is known from the three main islands of the Maltese archipelago where it appears to be widespread (see Fig. 1). The species occurs most frequently with the Harvester Ant *Messor capitatus* which is very abundant in the Maltese Islands (SCHEMBRI, 1981). The cricket is gregarious; 2 to 5 individuals have been observed in the superficial regions of the nests.

MYRMECOPHILUS (MYRMECOPHILUS) BARONII BACCETTI, 1966

This cricket was described from the Maltese Islands (type locality: St. Thomas Bay "Baia S. Tomaso", East Malta) from a nest of the ant *Camponotus barbaricus* Em. The type material, 1♂2♀♀, is deposited in Baccetti's collection.

Repeated intensive searches for this insect by the present author in the type locality and elsewhere proved futile in spite of the fact that the ant *Camponotus barbaricus* is common and widespread in all the islands of the Maltese group (SCHEMBRI, 1981). Recently, however, *M. baronii* was found at Buskett (near Wied il-Luq), South Malta.

MALTA: St. Thomas Bay 21.4.1965, 1♂2♀♀ (type material), leg. C. Baroni Urbani, coll. B. Baccetti (with *Camponotus barbaricus*); Buskett 30.4.1983, 2♀♀, leg. et coll. S. Schembri (with *Camponotus barbaricus*); Buskett 30.4.1984, 1♀, leg. et coll. S. Schembri (with *Messor structor*).

Myrmecophilus baronii is endemic to the Maltese Islands where it is very rare and very localized. The species associates mostly with the ant *Camponotus barbaricus* but also occurs with the Harvester Ant *Messor structor*.

KEY TO THE SPECIES OF *MYRMECOPHILUS* INHABITING THE MALTESE ISLANDS

Males and Females

1. Adult body length c. 3.2 mm; body dark brown; internal face of the apex of the posterior tibia with 5 large spines and 1 very small spine (Fig. 2A).....*Myrmecophilus ochraceus*

1a. Adult body length c. 4.0 mm; body pale brown; internal face of the apex of the posterior tibia with 6 large spines and 1 very small spine (Fig. 2B).....*Myrmecophilus baronii*

Myrmecophilus baronii can also be easily distinguished by its bulk, being about twice as large as *Myrmecophilus ochraceus*.

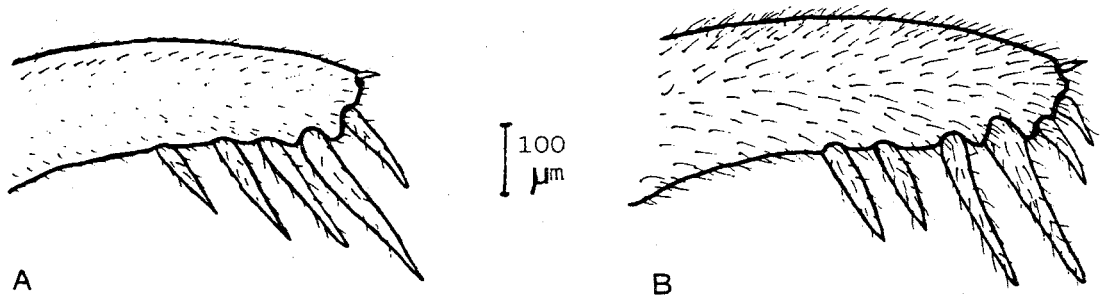

Fig. 2. Internal face of apex of the posterior tibia of Maltese *Myrmecophilus* species. A. *Myrmecophilus ochraceus;* B. *Myrmecophilus baronii.*

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