

***Psocids. Psocoptera (Booklice and barklice) (2nd edition) by T. R. New. Handbooks for the Identification of British Insects Vol. 1. Part 7. 1–146.*** Soft-bound. ISBN 0 901546 84 4. Published for the Royal Entomological Society by the Field Studies Council, Shrewsbury

I first became properly aware of Psocoptera in August 1979 when I found an *Ectopsocus* in my sweep net while working in Cornwall, and, rather than just tip it out as one of the many unrecognised insects present, I took it home and puzzled over it. I can't remember quite what it was about the tiny thing that made me keep it for closer investigation but it led me to Tim New's previous Handbook on the British Psocoptera, published in 1974. I found the identification key relatively easy to use and I soon identified the specimen as an *Ectopsocus briggsi* – I later discovered that this species was first found by C.A. Briggs at Lynmouth in Devon in 1899 and subsequently described as new to Science by R. McLachlan later the same year. It was clearly of very restricted occurrence at the time but is now one of the commonest insects on trees and shrubs throughout the country. J.V. Peters had however already found a very similar but different species in the genus to be widespread in Ireland during July 1976 and which was subsequently described as *E. petersi*, new to Science, by Courtney Smithers in 1978. So, the first Handbook was already out-of-date when I first started using it! Unfortunately my original *Ectopsocus* has not survived to reveal its true identity. Interestingly, both species now appear to be equally widespread across Britain – are they accidental introductions which have been gradually expanding? We don't know.

Six other species have also been recognised as occurring in Britain since *E. petersi*, and so a second edition of the Handbook bringing all of these into the identification keys, is very welcome. Of course, we have had the *Faune de France* volumes to keep us going, and particularly the latest and excellent volume 83 – *Psocoptères Euro-Méditerranéens* by Charles Lienhard (1998), but a key in one's native language is always much easier to use of course.

This Second Edition is an entirely new edition, with many additional features. A useful innovation is the inclusion of a section on field identification and recognition. The new keys are in the very clear and easy to use AIDGAP format, but unfortunately have a number of shortcomings and a few typos. A key irritation is that wing illustrations are referred to without any indication of the diagnostic features which categorically identify the species – an arrow indicating those features would help enormously. Such arrows are one of the strong-points of other AIDGAP style identification works and it seems very odd that they were not better used in this new Handbook. They do feature from time to time but the illustrations are more commonly left without such aids and the reader is left with a 'spot the [significant] difference' quandary. Charles Lienhard has already provided a detailed listing of problems with the keys (2006 *Systematic Entomology* 31: 729–730) and this won't be repeated here. The availability of this new Handbook has stimulated the launch of a Barkfly<sup>1</sup> Recording Scheme, with Bob Saville as Organiser, and it is intended that corrections to the keys will be featured on a new web-site linked to the Recording Scheme.

The free-living species feed on micro-organisms encrusting surfaces. In the case of trees, the surfaces may be the bark or the foliage. As with the lichens which share their bark habitat, it has been suggested that some may be good indicators of old

<sup>1</sup> Psocoptera have long been known as book-lice and the outdoor species as bark-lice, but they are not true lice and the new term barkfly has been chosen as a more useful common name.

growth conditions. Other species live in the field layer, amongst grasses and reeds, for example, and tend to be found in long-established and relatively undisturbed native vegetation. This all suggests that they deserve more attention from entomologists involved in site evaluation for conservation. Barkflies deserve to be better known and it is hoped that this new Handbook will bring them to a wider audience.

KEITH N. A. ALEXANDER