

Alien harvestmen in Sheffield

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Five species of Harvestmen (Arachnida:Opiliones) have 'invaded' and established themselves in Sheffield in recent years. *Dicranopalpus ramosus* first appeared in South Yorkshire in 2001² and its close relative *Dicranopalpus caudatus* was first found in Crookes as recently as 2017. Two further new species were also recognised from Crookes, *Opilio canestrinii* in 2007³ and *Platybunus pinetorum* in 2010^{4,6}. The former had been recorded moving northwards across Europe, with a noted loss of other related species in its wake^{1,5}. Changes in climate no doubt enhance the ability of a southern European species to survive further north. As they do so they can have a direct impact on local faunal composition when they arrive. Any such large predatory species must at least be competing for food sources, if not directly preying on similar species. *Platybunus pinetorum* exhibits a key survival strategy for an invasive species. It is parthenogenetic; it can reproduce when only females are present. By being able to reproduce from a single individual, such species can expand steadily outwards from a single point of arrival and establish a population. Finally, the very large and distinctive species, *Leiobunum* species A (as yet undescribed) was found new to Britain in Worksop in 2009, Barnsley in 2012⁶ and at several urban locations within Sheffield in 2016. It occurs in impressive aggregations of multiple individuals.

These species may have been introduced to Sheffield as dispersing adults, via human transportation or as eggs in plant pot soil, but all are spreading. As active predators and in their turn a prey item for other animals, they must be having an impact on the ecology of several species in the city.



Leiobunum spA male, Nether Edge 2016



Dicranopalpus caudatus, Crookes 2017

- 1 Hillyard, P.D. (2000) *Opilio canestrinii* (Thorell, 1876) – New species record for Britain. *Ocularium* **No.3, 1**.
- 2 Richards, J.P. (2002) Recorder's report for Harvestmen and Pseudoscorpions 2002 **Sorby Record 38** SNHS, Sheffield p 64 – 65
- 3 Richards, J.P (2008) Further records of the Red harvestman, *Opilio canestrinii* (Thorell, 1876) The Newsletter of the British Arachnological Society March 2008, **No111** pp 2 - 3
- 4 Richards, J.P. (2010a) *Platybunus pinetorum*, a new harvestman (Opiliones) to Britain. Spider Recording Scheme News, November 2010, **No 68** in The Newsletter of the British Arachnological Society November 2010, No 119
- 5 Richards, J.P. (2011) Further British records of the Red Harvestman *Opilio canestrinii* (Thorell, 1876) **Sorby Record 47** Sorby Natural History Society, Sheffield pp 79-81
- 6 Richards, J.P. (2014) Harvestmen Recorder's Report 2012 **Sorby Record 50** Sorby Natural History Society, Sheffield p14-15