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Revision of *Vilargus* Theron (Hemiptera: Cicadellidae: Deltocephalinae) from South Africa

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Abstract

The South African grass-feeding leafhopper *Vilargus* Theron is revised. *Vilargus pumilicans* (Naudé) is redescribed and the specific status of *V. campanus* (Naudé) is discussed. Seven new species of *Vilargus* are described: *V. bicornicans* **sp. n.**, *V. budenticans* **sp. n.**, *V. dentulicans* **sp. n.**, *V. lobulicans* **sp. n.**, *V. simulans* **sp. n.**, *V. triquetricans* **sp. n.** and *V. trunculicans* **sp. n.** A key is provided to males and known females of *Vilargus*. The species of this genus are small, light brown leafhoppers, commonly associated with grass in the Grassland Biome of South Africa, and rarely from the Savanna and Fynbos Biomes.

Key words: Grassland herbivore guild, Fynbos, Grassland, Afrotropical leafhopper fauna, Paralimnini

Introduction

The South African leafhopper genus *Vilargus* was described by Theron (1975), based on the male of *Deltocephalus pumilicans* Naudé, 1926. The male of this species is redescribed and the female is described for the first time. Additionally seven new species are described. *Vilargus* is placed in the tribe Paralimnini based on the shape of the connective that has its arms fused, and that is articulated with the aedeagus, based on tribal definitions (Webb & Heller, 1990, Zahniser & Dietrich, 2008).

This revision is the fifth contribution on leafhoppers of the Grassland Biome of South Africa (Stiller, 1998, 2009a, 2009b. 2010). *Vilargus* species are small, 2.0–3.2 mm long and generally light brown in colour without significant markings. They occur in various habitats such as moribund grassland, in flush after fire, in grass and forbs on road verges (considered unburned and ungrazed) and in pastures or grasslands grazed to varying degrees. Some of the dominant graminoids and cyperoids in these habitats which were sampled during the course of this study included the following: *Ficinia sp.* (Cyperaceae), *Andropogon schirensis* A.Rich., *Elionurus muticus* (Spreng.) Kunth, *Eragrostis capensis* (Thunb.) Trin., *E. curvula* (Schrad.) Nees, *E. gummiflua* Nees, *E. sclerantha* Nees subsp. *sclerantha*, *Eragrostis* sp., *Festuca* sp., *Harpachloa falx* (L.f.) Kuntze, *Heteropogon contortus* (L.) Roem. & Schult., *Loudetia simplex* (Nees) C.E. Hubb., *Melinis nerviglumis* (Franch.) Zizka, *Merxmuellera* sp., *Panicum natalensis* Hochst., *Themeda triandra* Forssk. (Poaceae). However, rigorous host associations cannot be made as these plant species or other grasses rarely occurred in pure stands where the species of *Vilargus* were collected, as discussed previously (Stiller, 2010). Most species of *Vilargus* appear to be less common than those of *Pravistylus* (revised by Stiller, 2010), with both often occurring together. The only possible exception is *V. pumilicans* that is widely distributed in the Fynbos and Grassland Biomes. Furthermore, *Vilargus* is very similar to *Pravistylus* in colour, shape, dimensions and some external male and female genitalic features. A discussion of the differences between these genera follows the redescription of *Vilargus*.

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