



Darwin's forgotten weevil

ROLF G. OBERPRIELER¹, RICHARD T. THOMPSON² & MAGNUS PETERSON³

¹CSIRO Entomology, GPO Box 1700, Canberra, A.C.T. 2601, Australia. E-mail: rolf.oberprieler@csiro.au

²Department of Entomology, The Natural History Museum, Cromwell Road, London SW7 5BD, United Kingdom

³Unit 5/33, Point Walter Road, Bicton, Perth, Western Australia 6157, Australia

Abstract

G. R. Waterhouse (1839) described the first species of weevil from the specimens collected by Charles Darwin in Australia in 1836. Named *Belus testaceus*, it was subsequently forgotten in all literature on Australian Belidae. Study of the type, as preserved in the Natural History Museum, London, revealed its name to be a senior synonym of *Belus linearis* Pascoe, 1870 (**syn. n.**). Known from only another six specimens taken about a century ago at the same locality, King George Sound (present-day Albany) in Western Australia, plus another four of uncertain origin, this species, now in the genus *Stenobelus* Zimmerman, appears to be restricted to the southern tip of Western Australia but of unknown current distribution, if it is indeed still extant. The only other species of the genus, *S. tibialis* (Blackburn), has a wider but highly fragmented distribution across Australia, apparently being common only in the acid swamplands (wallum) of south-eastern Queensland. The larval hostplants of both species are unknown. Diagnoses are provided for the genus *Stenobelus* as well as for its two species, and the holotypes of all applicable names are illustrated, together with the diagnostic features of the genus. Six species recently transferred to *Stenobelus* from *Rhinotia* by Legalov (2009) are again excluded from this genus, and the name of the subgenus *Germaribelus* Legalov, 2009 is placed in synonymy with *Rhinotia* Kirby, 1819 (**syn. n.**).

Key words: Belidae, diagnosis, King George Sound, revision, *Stenobelus*, *testaceus*, *tibialis*

Introduction

Charles Darwin (1809–1882) is famous for developing the theory of evolution by natural selection (Darwin 1859), but he was also an avid beetle collector from an early childhood. In his autobiography (Barlow 1958) he wrote: “But no pursuit at Cambridge was followed with nearly so much eagerness or gave me so much pleasure as collecting beetles. It was the mere passion for collecting, for I did not dissect them and rarely compared their external characters with published descriptions, but got them named anyhow. I will give a proof of my zeal: one day, on tearing off some old bark, I saw two rare beetles and seized one in each hand; then I saw a third and new kind, which I could not bear to lose, so that I popped the one which I held in my right hand into my mouth. Alas it ejected some intensely acrid fluid, which burnt my tongue so that I was forced to spit the beetle out, which was lost, as well as the third one.”. His original account of this incident, conveyed in a letter to Leonard Jenyns dated 17th October 1846, is considerably more vivid: “A *Cychnus rostratus* once squirted into my eyes and gave me extreme pain; and I must tell you what happened to me on the banks of the Cam, in my early entomological days: under a piece of bark I found two *Carabi* (I forget which), and caught one in each hand, when lo and behold I saw a sacred *Panagæus crux-major*! I could not bear to give up either of my *Carabi*, and to lose *Panagæus* was out of the question; so that in despair I gently seized one of the *Carabi* between my teeth, when to my unspeakable disgust and pain the little inconsiderate beast squirted his acid down my throat, and I lost both *Carabi* and *Panagæus*!” (Darwin 1887). Parts of Darwin's collection of British beetles are still preserved at Cambridge University (Smith 1987).

Between December 1831 and October 1836 Darwin cruised around the southern hemisphere on board the *H.M.S. Beagle*. In the final year of the voyage he spent 61 days in Australia, visiting Sydney and Bathurst