



Article

Chewing lice of the genus *Myrsidea* (Phthiraptera: Amblycera: Menoponidae) from passerines (Aves: Passeriformes) in South Africa, with descriptions of three new species

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Abstract

A total of 144 individuals of 46 bird species belonging to the 20 families were examined for chewing lice in South Africa. Considering only the genus *Myrsidea*, a total of 19 birds of 8 species were parasitised with 8 species of *Myrsidea*. Descriptions and illustrations are given for three new species of *Myrsidea*. The new species and their type hosts are: *Myrsidea aynazae* ex *Phyllastrephus flavostriatus* (Sharpe) (Pycnonotidae), *Myrsidea eslamii* ex *Zoothera gurneyi* (Hartlaub) (Turdidae) and *Myrsidea mariquensis* ex *Bradornis mariquensis* Smith (Muscicapidae). Records of new host-lice associations are: *Phyllastrephus terrestris* Swainson (Pycnonotidae) for *Myrsidea* sp., *Ploceus intermedius* Ruppell (Ploceidae) for *Myrsidea* sp., and *Turdus libonyanus* (Smith) (Turdidae) for *Myrsidea* sp.

Keywords: *Myrsidea*, Menoponidae, Amblycera, Phthiraptera, new species, Passeriformes, South Africa, new host-lice associations.

Introduction

Myrsidea Waterston, 1915 is the most speciose menoponid genus, parasitizing mainly passerine birds (Passeriformes). This genus currently contains about 350 described species occurring throughout the world (Sychra 2010). As a consequence of the large number of species, the only practical manner to deal with the taxonomy of such a large genus is to treat lice from each host family as a unit (Price and Dalglish 2007).

Among South Africa's nine provinces, Limpopo is the northernmost with about 630 recorded bird species (Lepage, 2012), of which only 20 (belonging to 13 families) are known to be hosts of 17 species of *Myrsidea* (Price *et al.* 2003). Records of chewing lice from birds in the Afrotropical region, including those occurring in South Africa, derive mainly from neighboring countries or from birds migrating from Europe. There are only 6 species of *Myrsidea* (*M. breviterga* Tandan & Clay, 1971; *M. eisentrauti* Klockenhoff, 1982; *M. eurocephali* Klockenhoff & Tendeiro, 1989; *M. queleae* Tendeiro, 1964; *M. seguyi* Tendeiro, 1958; and *M. textoris* Klockenhoff, 1984) recorded from South Africa (Tendeiro, 1958, 1964; Tandan & Clay, 1971; Klockenhoff, 1982, 1984; Klockenhoff & Tendeiro, 1989).

Despite previous reports of *Myrsidea* spp. from South African birds, there has not been any proper study of this louse genus in South Africa. The aim of this paper is to present new data on the distribution of chewing lice of the genus *Myrsidea* found on Passeriformes in South Africa, including description of three new species.