Zootaxa 3833 (1): 001–132
www.mapress.com/zootaxa/

Monograph

ISSN 1175-5326 (print edition)
ZOOTAXA
ISSN 1175-5334 (online edition)

http://dx.doi.org/10.11646/zootaxa.3833.1.1
http://zoobank.org/urn:lsid:zoobank.org:pub:0570DAAB-FC52-4384-B036-CAFFC34D63AF

ZOOTAXA

3833

Catalogue and historical overview of juvenile instars of oribatid mites (Acari: Oribatida)

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Magnolia Press
Auckland, New Zealand

Accepted by E. Sidorchuk: 9 Jun. 2014; published: 8 Jul. 2014

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Catalogue and historical overview of juvenile instars of oribatid mites (Acari: Oribatida)
(*Zootaxa* 3833)

132 pp.; 30 cm.

8 Jul. 2014

ISBN 978-1-77557-445-3 (paperback)

ISBN 978-1-77557-446-0 (Online edition)

FIRST PUBLISHED IN 2014 BY

Magnolia Press

P.O. Box 41-383

Auckland 1346

New Zealand

e-mail: zootaxa@mapress.com

http://www.mapress.com/zootaxa/

ISSN 1175-5326 (Print edition)

ISSN 1175-5334 (Online edition)

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Abstract

Oribatid mites (Acari: Oribatida) comprise a taxonomically and morphologically diverse suborder of about 10,000 described species, not including the hyporder Astigmata, with collectively a global distribution. They are primarily soil and litter inhabitants, feeding on fungi and decaying plant remains with various levels of specificity. Though all five active instars are important for reasons that relate to both ecology and systematics, most species are known only as adults. Our purpose was to gather the existing world literature on the active juvenile instars (i.e., excluding prelarva) of oribatid mites, to put classifications and nomenclature in a current context, and to identify the nature of the information in each paper. A selected historical overview identifies the contributions of 19th century authors C.L. Koch, H. Nicolet and A.D. Michael, and summarizes errors that resulted in various oribatid mite juveniles being classified in genera, families and even suborders that were different from those of their adult instars. The catalogue includes all species known to us for which juveniles have been described: 805 species in 310 genera, representing only about 8% of the known oribatid mite species and 30% of genera. These represent 118 families, about 70% of those known. At the superfamily level, representation is weakest among the diverse Oppioidea and Oribatuloidea, and those superfamilies with juveniles that are endophagous in organic substrates, such as Phthiracaroidea, Euphthiracaroidea and Carabodoidea. Representation is strongest in the middle-derivative hyporder Nothrina, in which adults and juveniles are more easily associated, and in brachypyline superfamilies that are mostly affiliated with aquatic, semiaquatic or intertidal environments, such as Limnozetoidea and Ameronothroidea. Juvenile instars remain unknown for 45 families of Brachypylina.

Four new nomenclatural actions were proposed: *Ojaithrus nymphoides* Habeeb, 1982 is a junior synonym of *Hydrozetes californiensis* Habeeb, 1974, *Cepheus feideri* Suciu & Panu, 1972 is a junior synonym of *Conoppia palmicincta* (Michael, 1880). Two species are recombined: *Ceratozetes kirgisicus* (Shaldybina, 1970) **comb. nov.** (from *Ceratozetella*); *Scheloribates (Hemileius) nicki* (Denmark & Woodring, 1965) **comb. nov.** (from *Hemileius*).

Key words: juvenile, immature oribatid mites, ontogeny, development, catalogue

Introduction

In their traditional sense, oribatid mites (Acari: Oribatida) comprise a taxonomically and morphologically diverse suborder of about 10,000 described species collectively with a global distribution (Schatz 2002; Subías 2004; Schatz *et al.* 2011; Subías *et al.* 2013). This diversity contrasts with a rather limited range of lifestyles. They are primarily soil and litter inhabitants, feeding on fungi and decaying plant remains with various levels of specificity, though many also are opportunistic feeders on nematodes and small dead invertebrates, and a small range of specialized habitats and feeding biologies is also known (Schuster 1956; Schneider *et al.* 2004; Norton & Behan-Pelletier 2009). If one includes the traditional suborder Astigmata—ca. 5000 species of parasites, commensals and free-living mites (OConnor 2009)—within oribatid mites, then Oribatida are diverse in all senses of the word (Norton 1998 and included references).

Groupings based on juveniles

As noted in the Introduction, F. Grandjean's seminal 1953 'Essai' was the first attempt to organize brachypyline oribatid mites based on juvenile morphology and molting traits (whether and how nymphs carry molted hysterosomal scalps of preceeding instars). With an overall objective of recognizing 'natural' groups, he organized brachypyline families in five 'sections': (1) Opsiopheredermes (carriers of only the 'latest' exuvial scalp, i.e. that of the tritonymph), (2) Eupheredermes ('true' scalp carriers), (3) Apheredermes with 'dorsodeficient' nymphs (no scalps and an absence of dorsocentral hysterosomal setae), (4) normal, 'pycnonotic' Apheredermes (nymphs with no scalps, dorsocentral setae present, and adults without the octotaxic system of porose organs), and (5) Poronotics (adults with the octotaxic system of porose organs in adults). As with most of his classifications (see also 1965c, 1969), he did not apply standard ranks to taxa above superfamily.

As an identification aid, Wallwork (1969) further sorted juvenile brachypylines into 10 groups based on these characters plus the general condition of nymphal cuticle (smooth, plicate) and the presence and nature of hysterosomal sclerites (macrosclerites, microsclerites). His dichotomous key, and the accompanying list of the common families in each group, remains the single diagnostic tool for a novice to begin the identification of an unknown juvenile brachypyline mite. While these various groupings are useful in discussions and in identification, it remains to be shown which, if any, represent monophyletic entities. Opsiophererderm and 'apophererderm' categories are effectively redundant with Hermanniellidae and Oribatellidae, respectively, the only families with nymphs of these types. The monophyly of the poronotic group was questioned extensively by Woas (1990; but see Norton & Alberti 1997), although Grandjean's other groupings were inherent to his extensive analysis of oribatid mite classification (Woas 2002). Recently, the monophyly of Grandjean's and Wallwork's groups was tested with molecular data by Schäffer *et al.* (2010), who found much homoplasy in the distribution of the characters used in these groupings and rejected them as meaningful taxa.

Despite these higher-level concerns, detailed studies of juveniles should prove helpful in classifying the many genera and families that are currently seen as problematic. Even if not definitive, the presence of certain sets of juvenile traits can narrow possibilities. The presence of hysterosomal excentrosclerites, for example, is essentially a spot-character for membership in Oripodoidea, and a nymph with both plicate cuticle and exuvial scalps immediately suggests Neoliodoidea or Zetorchestoidea. A number of 'success stories' were noted in the Introduction, but more will certainly be written as workers are more attentive to the possibilities. For example, Coetzee & Tiedt (2013) recently found adult characters to paint a rather equivocal picture of the relationships of the poronotic genus *Afroleius*, and were hopeful that the eventual discovery of juveniles would prove decisive.

As with any other type of data, juvenile characters alone are unlikely to be a panacea for all problems of relationship within Brachypylina. This is attested to by the three unplaced taxa at the end of the catalogue, for which juveniles are at least partially known. The strange ant-associated Aribatidae, including a single known paedomorphic species, remains enigmatic (Norton & Behan-Pelletier 2009). The genera *Paralamellobates* and *Plakoribates* have been variously included in Oribatellidae, Austrachipteriidae, or Achipteriidae, or treated as unplaced genera in Ceratozetoidea (e.g. Fujikawa 1991b; Balogh & Balogh 1992; Subías 2004), but each association is supported only by a few superficial similarities (see discussions in Norton & Alberti 1997; Woas 2002; Norton & Behan-Pelletier 2009). Dr. V.M. Behan-Pelletier (pers. comm. 2014) pointed out to us how similar the tuberculate juveniles of *Plakoribates* are to those of *Hypozetes*, which she had transferred to an expanded concept of Tegoribatidae (Behan-Pelletier 2001, see also Behan-Pelletier & Walter 2013), but neither juveniles nor the adult are known well enough for a thorough analysis.

The strongest and most reasonable phylogenetic hypotheses and classifications are developed and tested using a variety of data and analytical methods. For oribatid mites, as for any other group of organisms with clear developmental transitions, the potential contribution of morphology is strongly limited if ontogeny is unknown or ignored. We hope this catalogue will serve well as a point of entry to the rich, but fragmented literature on oribatid mite juveniles and, in doing so, also play a heuristic role by identifying taxa that are most in need of study.

Acknowledgements

Various types of helpful information were provided by Prof. Drs. Stanisław Seniczak (Bydgoszcz, Poland), Luis

Subías (Madrid, Spain) and Gerd Weigmann (Berlin, Germany); Dr. Heinrich Schatz (Innsbruck, Austria) kindly allowed access to unpublished databases. Dr. Bruce Halliday (Canberra, Australia) provided cogent advice concerning nomenclatural issues. An embarrassing number of errors and inconsistencies were prevented by the careful, constructive reviews of Dr. Valerie Behan-Pelletier (Ottawa, Canada), Dr. Tobias Pfingstl (Graz, Austria) and editor Dr. Ekaterina Sidorchuk (Moscow, Russia). We are very grateful to all.

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