



Microdrile Oligochaeta in bromeliad pools of a Honduran cloud forest

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Abstract

Phytotelmata, or plant-held water bodies, often house complex aquatic invertebrate communities. Microdrile oligochaetes (Clitellata, Annelida) are known to be part of that community, but specimens are rarely identified to species level. Here we report three species of Enchytraeidae and three species of Naididae from a collection sampled in phytotelms of bromeliads in Cusuco National Park, Honduras. Two species of enchytraeids are new to science. *Bryodrilus hondurensis* sp. nov. is distinguished from other members of the genus by the high number of ventral chaetae, up to 11 per bundle. The genus is Holarctic and this is the southernmost record so far of a *Bryodrilus* species. *Hemienchytraeus phytotelmatus* sp. nov. is distinguished by a combination of characters, among which the huge spermathecae and seminal vesicles are most conspicuous. The genus is common in tropical and subtropical soils around the world. A third species of enchytraeids in the collection, *Cernovitoviella atrata* (Bretscher), is redescribed, together with three known species of Naididae, *Pristina jenkinsi* (Stephenson), *Pristina osborni* (Walton) and *Pristina terrena* Collado & Schmelz. Presence of ingested debris and humus in the intestine of most specimens suggests that the collected animals live and reproduce in the phytotelms. We provide a list of oligochaete species recorded so far from bromeliad pools in Central and South America.

Key words: Clitellata, Enchytraeidae, Naididae, phytotelmata, Cusuco National Park, new species

Introduction

In the Neotropics, numerous species of bromeliads are able to hold water in their central tube- or funnel-shaped tanks of tightly overlapping leaves and their lateral leaf axils. These compartments, named phytotelmata (Varga 1928), are plant delineated water bodies, typically filled with water and decaying plant matter. They are developed also in other plant taxa, in Asia for example mostly in the carnivorous pitcher plants (*Nepenthes* spp.). Phytotelmata frequently house complex aquatic animal communities, ranging from protozoans to vertebrates (Picado 1913; Frank & Lounibos 1983; Frank *et al.* 2004). These small aquatic habitats have been studied for their specialised fauna and as a brooding site for mosquitoes as vectors of human pathogens. Recently they have received renewed interest due to their potential as model systems to address ecological questions in small but natural ecosystems (Srivastava *et al.* 2004). There are several overviews of the insect fauna in these habitats (e.g. Frank & Lounibos 1983); a more comprehensive overview of inhabitants in pitcher plants was published by Adlassnig *et al.* (2011).

Less information is available on the non-insect fauna in phytotelmata, but see the overview of Crustacea in phytotelmata (Jocque *et al.* 2013). Oligochaetes are often recorded from these habitats (Picado 1913; Laessle 1961; Paoletti *et al.* 1991; Richardson *et al.* 2000; Carrias *et al.* 2001; Ospina-Bautista *et al.* 2004; Jocque *et al.* 2010), but after the seminal monograph of Picado (1913), they were rarely identified to species level. Both megadrile and microdrile oligochaetes have been found. Four earthworm species belonging to two families were recorded in Picado (1913) from bromeliads in Costa Rica, all identified or described by W. Michaelsen (1912). From 1995 on, a more directed search for earthworms in bromeliad tanks revealed the presence of more species (Righi 1995;

accidental finds of epiphytic or terrestrial oligochaetes living in the surrounding litter, moss or bark of the trees, and trapped in the phytotelms. A truly terrestrial enchytraeid, once submerged in water, empties the gut within one or two days and does not ingest new material (Schmelz & Collado 2010). The preserved and whole-mounted Honduras specimens have humus and plant debris often in the anterior regions of the gut (from segment XIV on), which means that the material has been ingested only a short time (less than an hour) before fixation (Schmelz, unpublished observations).

Furthermore, species of *Pristina* and *Cernosvitoviella* are considered to be aquatic oligochaetes, and two species (*P. jenkinsae*, *P. osborni*) have been found in bromeliad pools previously, *P. jenkinsae* together with the specialist *Aulophorus superterrenus* (Marcus 1943). It might however be that these species live in a thin water film covering the vegetation. A large number of aquatic microcrustaceans in the same location are found thriving in a thin water film on the leaf litter and on vegetation and are occasionally washed in bromeliads (Jocque *et al.* 2013). Although nothing at all is known about enchytraeids in Honduras, extrapolations from other tropical sites suggest that the permanently moist litter and organic soil of these montane cloud forest harbours a species-rich and abundant community of enchytraeids, with *Hemienchytraeus* as one of the dominant genera (Schmelz *et al.* 2013).

The affinity of oligochaetes to bromeliad pools differs greatly among species, and the same species may behave differently in different habitats. At one end of the scale are species that are only sporadically found in the pools and whose natural habitat is elsewhere, litter, soil, decaying wood, freshwater sediment, or soils; an example for the latter is *Dichogaster bolaii* (Michaelsen, 1891) (James & Brown 2006). At the other end of the scale are the true specialists that are mainly found in the pools and which may show adaptations for dispersal among bromeliads. Up to now the only bromeliad specialist among microdrile oligochaetes is the naeid *Aulophorus superterrenus* Michaelsen, 1912 (= *Dero superterrena*), found frequently, almost exclusively and often in high abundance in epiphytic and terrestrial bromeliads in Central and South America (Picado 1913; Marcus 1943; Righi 1984; Christoffersen 2007). Only one record so far is outside this peculiar habitat (Di Persia 1980: fluvial littoral, Argentina). These worms have the special adaptation of actively using frogs as dispersal agents by attaching to their moist skin (Lopez *et al.* 1999, 2005). Marcus (1943) gives a detailed account of the species' anatomy and reproduction.

Among earthworms, many species of *Eutrigaster* are described as specialists from bromeliad pools, however these species are often found in litter or soil as well. Interestingly, the degree of affinity of *Eutrigaster* species to phytotelms is dependant on the geographical region and the habitat: In tropical forests of Central America these species are predominantly found in bromeliad pools, but in pine-oak forests of Costa Rica > 1000 m asl, most of the species are found in the litter (Fragoso *et al.* 1995). Fragoso and Rojas-Fernández (1996) present a series of interesting ecological, historical and phylogenetic hypotheses to explain this peculiar distribution pattern.

Some of the microdrile oligochaetes found in the Honduras bromeliad pools seem to have a large geographic distribution. Among the three species of *Pristina* identified here, two (*P. jenkinsae*, *P. osborni*) are cosmopolitan. *P. jenkinsae* has been recorded from terrestrial habitats in moist forest soils of the Brazilian Amazon (Collado & Schmelz 2000, 2001; Augustsson 2001) and the Mata Atlântica (Römbke *et al.* 2005), where it can be abundant. It seems to be a common inhabitant of moist tropical and subtropical forest soils. The same may apply to *P. terrena*, originally described from tropical forest soil.

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