



Orthopteroids of the British Isles Recording Scheme and Website

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On Wednesday 19th November 2008 the Orthoptera website www.orthoptera.org.uk was launched at the British Natural History Museum in London. The site provides details of the Orthoptera (grasshoppers, ground-hoppers, true crickets and bush-crickets) to be found in the British Isles, along with a number of allied groups that have traditionally been associated with them, *i.e.* Dictyoptera (cockroaches and praying mantids), Dermaptera (earwigs) and Phasmids (stick insects).

The status of all of these groups of species has been monitored through the Orthoptera Recording Scheme which has been collating 10 km distribution records since 1967, and is currently undergoing what will hopefully be a radical metamorphosis. At present, all records, from traditional cards and paper format to Excel files and other e-documents are sent to me for processing, and subsequently on to the Biological Records Centre. The website will now hopefully alleviate what essentially amounts to a 'bottleneck' regarding the processing of these records by a single individual, by providing a facility for recorders and other holders of records to submit their records in a standard format (subject to verification by the scheme organizer where required), directly to BRC through an Orthoptera Recording Scheme website. (Of course for those who prefer traditional methods, the facility to send card and other records to the scheme organizer will always remain in place.) This in turn will allow the data to be processed more efficiently and provide feedback regarding the current status of each species described.

This will also assist and hopefully speed up the development of the forthcoming Orthoptera Atlas, which is continuing at pace, with well over 1,000 new 10 km squares being added to species maps. The last UK distribution atlas was published over a decade ago and was the product of many years of hard work by the then recording scheme organiser Chris Haes, Paul Harding and others at the Biological Records Centre, and over 1500 individual recorders who had provided data, both recent and historical, to build up as complete a picture as possible of the historical and current fortunes of the British Orthoptera and Allied Species.



Since that time, many new recorders have submitted records, and in addition to their superb efforts, I personally owe a considerable debt of gratitude to my two predecessors, Chris Haes and John Widgery, for their sound advice; and particularly to my immediate predecessor, John Widgery, for collating over 2,000 post-1997 Atlas records prior to my appearance as Recording Scheme Organiser in 2002.

The value of a new UK distribution atlas is exemplified by the maps that have recently been produced for Orthoptera in other European countries, revealing the extensive changes that have occurred in recent years. It is expected that the forthcoming UK atlas will be equally as dramatic regarding those species that have experienced significant range expansions in recent years *e.g.* Roesel's Bush-cricket *Metrioptera roeselii* (the UK maps will be colour-coded by date-class, showing the year on year colonization of new regions), and those that have become established as apparently natural colonists (*e.g.* the Sickle-bearing Bush-cricket *Phaneroptera falcata*) or as introduced aliens (*e.g.* the Southern Oak Bush-cricket *Meconema meridionale*).

In addition to the large amount of information available for each species recorded by the scheme (examples of colour photographs to aid identification are provided on Plate 1), the website provides facilities for the detailed on-line submission of records and photographs, and also allows for submission of site survey records. Of course there will be teething problems, as there were with other similar schemes when they were launched, but if the on-line submission system is as successful as those schemes, *e.g.* the ladybird mapping scheme, it will represent a significant step forward in the way that data is submitted and processed.



The Field Grasshopper (*Chorthippus brunneus*) photographed by AES Bugclubber Eleanor Wilkins at Fingringhoe Wick, Essex, in September.