

**Hiding in plain sight, *Philoscia affinis* Verhoeff, 1908 new to Worcestershire (Isopoda: Philosciidae)**

Gary Farmer

*Philoscia muscorum* also known as the Striped Woodlouse is common in Worcestershire and will be familiar to anyone who turns logs and stones in search of invertebrates. This is the woodlouse that races off at speed when exposed to light. This behaviour ,combined with its shiny black head and ‘go-faster’ stripe have given rise to its alternative name of Fast Phil (01). It is one of the ‘familiar five’ woodlice; the others being the Shiny Woodlouse *Oniscus asellus* (02), Rough Woodlouse *Porcellio scaber* (03), Pygmy Woodlouse *Trichoniscus pusillus* (04) and Pill Woodlouse *Armadillidium vulgare* (05).



01. *Philoscia muscorum* 31.03.19 Redditch. Gary Farmer



02. *Oniscus asellus* 15.10.17 Redditch. Gary Farmer



03. *Porcellio scaber* 15.10.17 Redditch. Gary Farmer



04. *Trichoniscus pusillus* 31.03.19 Redditch. Gary Farmer



05. *Armadillidium vulgare* 05.04.19 Clarks Hill, Evesham. Gary Farmer.

Unfortunately familiarity breeds complacency resulting in what might appear to be a common species being passed-by without a second glance; this has certainly proven to be the case with *Philoscia muscorum*.

In 2018 Volume 30 of the *Bulletin of the British Myriapod & Isopod Group* (BMIG) carried a paper titled *Philoscia affinis* Verhoeff, 1908 new to the UK (Stijn Segers et. al. 2018). In the paper the authors discuss the discovery of a specimen of *Philoscia affinis* in the collection of the Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences which was apparently collected in the UK in 1985. *Philoscia affinis* was not known to be native to the UK, so they questioned whether the specimen had been mislabelled or had actually been caught in the UK. The authors visited England in July 2017 to search for the species and eventually found *Philoscia affinis* in South East England confirming its presence in the UK.

British Myriapod & Isopod Group website states “Although superficially similar to the ubiquitous *P. muscorum* in general appearance, the pigmentation of the head and body is a good guide to identification”.

This description sounded familiar to me and I found a photo that I had taken in Wyre Forest in 2015 labelled as *Philoscia muscorum* but the woodlouse in the photo had a spotty head (06) rather than the characteristic shiny black head. But, according to BMIG website “Reliable identification requires microscopic examination of 7th pereopod of a male specimen”. The 7<sup>th</sup> pereopod (hind leg) has a small hook as shown in Segers et al 2018. For *Philoscia affinis* this hook stands up tooth-like whereas for *Philoscia muscorum* the hook

is bowed down back to the leg thumb-like. I was unable to confirm this from the photo



06. *Philoscia* sp. 10.10.15 Wyre Forest. Gary Farmer.

So, during a Wyre Forest Study Group meeting at Uncllys Farm in Wyre Forest on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2019 I searched for and found a spotty-headed *Philoscia* woodlouse (

I photographed the specimen (07, 08 & 09) which by chance was a male from above and below and sent the images to the Woodlouse and Waterlouse Recording Scheme organiser Steve Gregory. He replied that he was “95% certain it is *P.affinis*. However, angle of male 7th leg is important for viewing the ‘tooth’ you arrow. Ideally leg should be removed from the specimen and allowed to lie flat as it naturally lies. At other angles of view, such as when leg still attached to the body, the obscure curved tooth that is present in *P. muscorum* can become more apparent and more *P.affinis*-like”.



07. *Philoscia affinis* 23.03.19 Wyre Forest. Gary Farmer.



08. *Philoscia affinis* 23.03.19 Uncllys Wyre. Gary Farmer



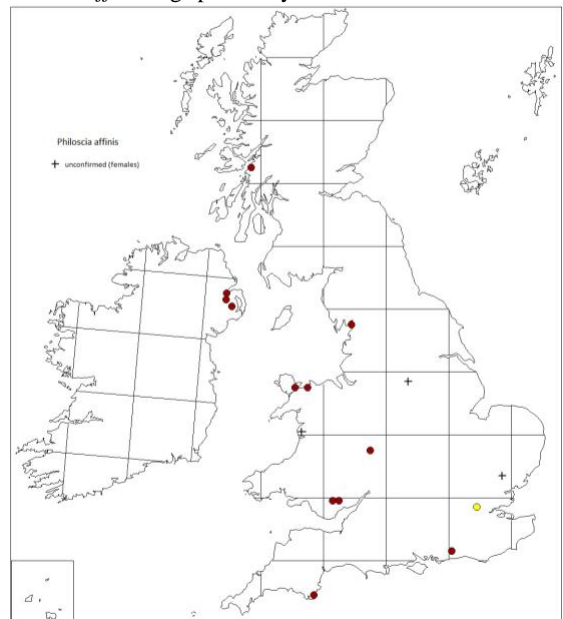
09. *Philoscia affinis* specimen and leg spine 23.03.19 Wyre Forest Gary Farmer.

I sent a second image of the leg (10) showing the tooth more clearly and Steve confirmed that “this is a male *P. affinis*. [this] record, to date, is the most inland record for a confirmed male. I expect it remains very unrecorded though (but I have so far failed to find it in Oxfordshire, and searches in Essex and Lothians have also failed to find it)”.

He attached a map of its current known UK distribution, including the Wyre Forest record (11).



10. *Philoscia affinis* leg spine Gary Farmer.



11. *Philoscia affinis* UK distribution March 2019.

So, the question remains, how widely distributed is *Philoscia affinis* in Worcestershire?

#### Acknowledgement.

The UK *Philoscia affinis* distribution map by kind permission of Steve Gregory, Woodlouse and Waterlouse Recording Scheme Organiser. More details of the recording scheme <http://www.bmig.org.uk/page/woodlice-waterlice-recording-scheme>

#### References

BMIG website- <http://www.bmig.org.uk/species/philoscia-affinis>  
Stijn Segers, Pepijn Boeraeve & Pallieter de Smedt (2018).  
*Philoscia affinis* Verhoeff, 1908 new to the UK (Isopoda: Philosciidae) available at:  
[http://www.bmig.org.uk/sites/www.bmig.org.uk/files/bulletin/BullBMIG30p21-25\\_Segers-etal\\_P-affinis-UK.pdf](http://www.bmig.org.uk/sites/www.bmig.org.uk/files/bulletin/BullBMIG30p21-25_Segers-etal_P-affinis-UK.pdf) [Accessed 06.04.19].

#### Further sightings

During a Wyre Forest study Group meeting on 13th April 2019 two further *Philoscia affinis* woodlice were found. The first by Ian Wright (Hitterhill Coppice SO770 759) and the second by Brett Westwood (Forest Lodge Stream SO772 756). Both of these, like the original one were found under small pieces of rotting oak branches lying on leaf litter.

During a walk around the Knapp and Papermill Reserve at Alfrick on 15.04.19) Nicki and Gary Farmer found several *Philoscia affinis* in the woodland (SO745 515) under small rotting oak branches on deep leaf-litter.

#### Images

- 01 *Philoscia muscorum* 31.03.19 Redditch. Gary Farmer
- 02 *Oniscus asellus* 15.10.17 Redditch. Gary Farmer
- 03 *Porcellio scaber* 15.10.17 Redditch. Gary Farmer
- 04 *Trichoniscus pusillus* 31.03.19 Redditch. Gary Farmer
- 05 *Armadillidium vulgare* 05.04.19 Clarks Hill, Evesham. Gary Farmer.
- 06 *Philoscia* sp. 10.10.15 Wyre Forest. Gary Farmer.
- 07 *Philoscia affinis* 23.03.19 Wyre Forest. Gary Farmer.
- 08 *Philoscia affinis* 23.03.19 Unclyys Wyre. Gary Farmer.
- 09 *Philoscia affinis* specimen and leg spine 23.03.19 Wyre Forest Gary Farmer.
- 10 *Philoscia affinis* leg spine Gary Farmer.
- 11 *Philoscia affinis* UK distribution March 2019.

The UK *Philoscia affinis* distribution map by kind permission of Steve Gregory, Woodlouse and Waterlouse Recording Scheme Organiser. More details of the recording scheme <http://www.bmig.org.uk/page/woodlice-waterlice-recording-scheme>

#### Woodlouse and Waterlouse Recording Scheme (BMIG)

The Non-marine Isopod Recording Scheme was established in 1968 to collate biological records of all species of Terrestrial Woodlice (suborder Oniscidea) and the Aquatic Waterlice (or Water-slaters) (suborder Asellota). An analysis of the ecological data for woodlice was undertaken for the publication of the *Woodlice in Britain and Ireland* (Harding & Sutton, 1985).

[www.bmig.org.uk](http://www.bmig.org.uk)