Harvestmen (Arachnida: Opiliones) from the Vjosa valley in Albania

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The small collection of harvestman material from the Vjosa River, from the vicinity of the village Kuta, revealed the presence of 3 species from 3 families: Paranemastoma longipes, Opilio cf. parietinus and Nelima sempronii. The harvestman fauna of Albania is poorly known. The finding of Nelima sempronii at the riversides of the Vjosa is the first record of this interesting species for Albania. The results of the present study, although based on random data, are a valuable contribution to the knowledge of the Opiliones fauna of this country. Furthermore, they emphasize the urgent need for further research as well as protection and conservation of this unique area at the Vjosa River, being seriously threatened by a proposed hydroelectric power dam.

Keywords: Harvestman, Opiliones, Arachnida, Albania, Vjosa river, pristine conditions, nature conservation.

Introduction

Harvestmen (Opiliones) are a popular arachnid order with a remarkable diversity of morphological appearance and biological pattern. Due to their general preference for humid environments, the majority of the species inhabit woods, forests, alpine areas and vegetation-covered, humid riversides.

The harvestman fauna of Albania is still poorly known. However, a checklist of recorded species and distribution maps are available (Mitov 2000).

Harvestmen were not collected specifically during this Vjosa field trip, and the focus of the pitfall-program lay on the extended gravel banks of the river. Therefore, the Opiliones material from this present study is quite poor. Nevertheless, the results derived from the analysis of these few specimens are worth being published. It is a small further contribution to the knowledge of Albanian harvestmen and should indicate the need for further research and the importance of conservation of the Vjosa river.

Material and Methods

The field work was conducted along the Vjosa River, in the vicinity of the village Kuta (Albania), in the period of 24.–28.04.2017. The not very extensive material was collected by hand at day and night (G. Kunz, H. Gunczy & W. Paill leg.). Two further juvenile
phalangiids came from pitfall traps; due to the improper conservation solution for arachnids, this material was not usable any more.

Taxonomic identification of the harvestman specimens was conducted by the author by means of Martens (1978) and Schenkel (1947); Plamen Mitov confirmed Paranemastoma longipes. The material is deposited in the collection of Christian Komposch in Graz, Austria (Coll. OEKO).

**Species list**

Altogether, 3 species from 3 families were recorded.

1) *Paranemastoma longipes* (Schenkel, 1947), Nemastomatidae

Material: 1 ♂: On the way from Kuta to the Vjosa river; country lane in between a corrected creek and arable land; 40°27′52″ N, 19°45′40″ E, 55 m a.s.l., 23.4.2017, hand collecting at night, G. Kunz & H. Gunczy leg. 2 ♂♂: Vjosa river, WSW Kuta; ditch with softwood and *Typha* sp., silt or clayey silt; 40°28,319′ N, 19°45,297′ E, 48–52 m a.s.l., 25.4.2017, hand collecting, W. Paill leg.

The species is recorded from Bosnia, Herzegovina and Albania (Mitov 2000). Up to now it was known in Albania from just 4 localities. Due to the high variability and poor descriptions by C.-F. Roewer, this genus can be called a taxonomic nightmare.

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Fig. 1: *Paranemastoma longipes* is characterised by its dorsal golden pattern and the male genital morphology. Photo: Gernot Kunz. – Abb. 1. *Paranemastoma longipes* ist durch seine goldene Rückenzeichnung und die männliche Genitalmorphologie charakterisiert. Foto: Gernot Kunz.
2) *Opilio cf. parietinus* (De Geer, 1778), Phalangiidae

Material: 1 ♀: Kuta near Vjosa river; country lane near the village; 40°28'12" N, 19°46'00" E, 106 m a.s.l., 25.4.2017, hand collecting at night, G. Kunz & H. Gunczy leg.

The determination of *Opilio*-females is a challenge, especially in the Mediterraneis. Femur II of the collected female has a length of 9 mm. The mottling of the Coxae shows a dark distal spot and some smaller additional fluent mottles (“Wischer”).

In Northern and Central Europe, *Opilio parietinus* is a synanthropic species. Due to the competition of the invasive neozoon *Opilio canestrinii*, this formerly frequent and widespread inhabitant of walls in urban areas has declined to a great extent and became lost regionally (Komposch 2009; S. Toft in litt.). Martens (1978) hypothesizes the primary area of *Opilio parietinus* in the Middle East and Central Asia. The populations in Albania could be part of the northern range of its primary area.

3) *Nelima sempronii* Szalay, 1951, Sclerosomatidae

Material: 1 ♀: Vjosa riverbanks; moist, old branch of the Vjosa river; 40°27’31” N, 19°44’41” E, 52 m a.s.l., 26.4.2017, hand collecting at day, G. Kunz & H. Gunczy leg.

The collected female shows a body length of 5.8 mm.

The ecology and distribution of *Nelima sempronii* is still mysterious and hardly explainable. The ecological behaviour of this species has to be classified as diplo-stenococious: in
Central Europe, this hemihygrophilous harvestman inhabits both riversides and shady, humid-coolish microhabitats in our cultural landscape, and urban areas (Komposch & Gruber 2004). The evaluation of historic data should throw light on the assumed recent expansion of its area.

New to Albania!

Fig. 3: Nelima sempronii poses us a zoogeographical riddle concerning its origin. Photo: Christian Komposch, ÖKOTeam. – Abb. 3: Der Honiggelbe Weberknecht (Nelima sempronii) gibt uns ein zoogeographisches Rätsel bezüglich seiner Herkunft auf. Foto: Christian Komposch, ÖKOTeam.

Discussion and conclusions

The present data are a first and random contribution to the harvestman fauna of the Vjosa river. In total, 3 species could be documented. Due to the new record of Nelima sempronii, the total number of harvestman species known from Albania is raised to 32. As a matter of fact, the presented data are incidental finds; along the Vjosa river, a total of 30 harvestman species can be expected. The entire harvestman fauna of Albania should comprise approx. 70 to 90 species. Further opilionological research is urgently required.

Up to now, the investigation area at the Vjosa river near Kuta is the only known locality of the riverside-species Nelima sempronii in Albania. For this reason and because of the high potential of rich harvestman coenoses, the protection and conservation of the Vjosa river as the last pristine and unspoilt river landscape in Europe is urgently called for.
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Literature


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