

RETURN TO MACEDONIA – A TALE OF MIXED FORTUNES**by Robert Angus**

In September 2006 I returned from a short collecting trip to Macedonia with a good haul of almost certain *Stictotarsus macedonicus* Georgiev, horrendously blistered feet and a determination to return to try and get *S. macedonicus* from the right (type) lake. A visit to my daughter Lizzie in Liverpool shortly afterwards led to the purchase of a pair of extremely comfortable walking boots and a good feeling that a down-payment towards the return trip had been made.

So it was that in September this year Lizzie, David Bilton and I found ourselves drinking Skopsko beer in the to me familiar surroundings of the Petrol Company Hotel outside Tetovo, waiting for our arranged meeting with Jovan Bozinoski who had guided me so well the previous year. Soon Jovan was there and we began our arrangements. The weather prospects seemed



reasonable, so early the next morning, Sunday, Jovan and his friends turned up in a red Russian “Jeep” for the drive up to Ljuboten and the trek to the Livadica Lake, type locality of *S. macedonicus*. The journey through Vratnica village and up the track towards the Ljuboten Hut was familiar from last year, though the track seemed rougher than I remembered. Shortly before the hut we turned off to go higher on Ljuboten itself, to begin the walk. The clouds were rather low, but we hoped for improvement and set off. The track led across the scree which had barred my way last year, and eventually we reached the col (Ljubonen’s Neck), which again I remembered. But alas the cloud did not lift and a strong cold wind was blowing. Jovan offered round the Fisherman’s Friends which now appear to be all the range in Macedonia. Reluctantly we decided to turn back, comforted by the prospect of hot soup at the Ljuboten Hut. Lunch at the hut was a jovial affair with not only the hot soup, but also home made rakia liqueur (zholtia) flavoured with sprigs of juniper and another aromatic herb, and our first encounter with shopska salad. This consists of chopped tomato and cucumber – and red pepper in the finer versions (which this was!), covered with grated cheese, and, again in finer versions, rings of red chilli. The whole thing is arranged in an oval mound – a bit like the royal Saxon burial mound at Sutton Hoo, and delicious! The other feature of note was a very fine portrait of Livadica Lake which Jovan had taken, and now assumed the guise of “the one that got away”!

We decided to try again the next day, and Jovan asked if we would like to have a traditional Macedonian meal at the Hut afterwards, as Betty and her husband Mitko, who look after the hut (normally only open at weekends), would be pleased to provide this. An offer we could not refuse! Next morning Jovan and friends plus jeep duly arrived at the hotel, and again we set off. We had arranged to wait at the hut for the clouds to lift – which this time they began to do. So, “up and away” – across the scree again, back to the col, and this time David was able to collect *Hydroporus gueorguevi* in a spring. Then over to the other side of the valley and up onto the ridge – in part the mountain of Livada, which means an upland meadow – an alp! It was a long trek, up and down, mainly along the (at times very narrow) ridge. And then the cloud really did lift and there in the distance was the lake, in a fine corrie. We

walked down to the lake and paused for lunch. David was first into the lake. I waited with anticipation for his shout that the beetle was there – but it never came. I donned my waders and joined the search – but alas the beetle was not to be had that day. David got a good haul of the *solieri* form of *Agabus bipustulatus* and I got a *Corixa punctata*, which I particularly wanted in Macedonia, for Ignacio Ribera to do DNA work on. Eventually we had to admit it was time to begin the return journey, but although the absence of *S. macedonicus* was disappointing, the day left us with a good feeling. We had got there, we had done our best – and if David didn't get it either it wasn't just my ineffectual net-work! So we trekked back. As we once more tackled the scree Lizzie asked Jovan how far he thought we would have walked in total. About 18 kilometres! No wonder we were tired!

Back at the Hut dinner did not disappoint! Betty had prepared, in addition to shopska and another salad, a magnificent rich pork casserole. It was absolutely delicious! In response to our enthusiastic praise Betty remarked that her cooking was considered so good that she had problems with her blood. We didn't think she meant anaemia! Dinner was accompanied by more beer, *zholy* and the local red wine *Tga za Jug* (yearning for the south). We all slept well that night.

Next day we again met up for the second of our agreed walks, this time to Crno Ezero (Black Lake) at the western end of the Šar Planina mountains. This was a much shorter trek, and Miki (Miroslav), the driver and owner of the jeep, was able to go high on to the mountain before the ground became too slippery. As we walked up the grassy slope I was delighted to find brilliant metallic green dumbledors (Geotrupidae), as bright as *Cetonia* rose-chafers. They turned out to be *Trypocopris vernalis* (*Geotrupes* in British keys), the one British species whose chromosomes I didn't have. I have them now! Crno Ezero is lower than the Livadica lake, and this time *S. macedonicus* was present, but not abundant. David collected in and around the lake, with *solieri* type *Agabus bipustulatus* in the lake but only normal *bipustulatus* in neighbouring dried-out pools – flushed out by pouring water into them from his tray. He also got *Helophorus nivalis apfelbecki* Knisch – described from Albania and the only serious European *Helophorus* I had so far been unable to locate! A separate note on this will be forthcoming shortly. He also found *Hydroporus gueorguievi* again, in a spring. On the way back we stopped near a marshy area David had noted on the way up. I took the opportunity to do some dung-beetle work and was rewarded with an abundance of *Onthophagus fracticornis* – another beetle needed for chromosome work, and which had up till then eluded me. Jovan, observing my antics in the dung-piles remarked that he (a trainee vet) was used to the stuff “at source”! When it came to hand-washing afterwards he poured the water from the bottle with a distinctly practised hand!

This was planned to be the last of our mountain days, but it was clear that the lower ground was very dry, and David had been researching likely spring-areas and wondered about the mountains a bit further south, near the Albanian border. Jovan said we would definitely need police clearance for that area, but that he thought he could arrange this. We planned to go down to Lake Ohrid and agreed to phone him on the Thursday afternoon to see how things were.

Lake Ohrid is beautiful, as is Ohrid town. We collected some of the Ohrid endemic fauna (Molluscs, Amphipods etc.), but beetling away from the lake was frustrated by general drought. David eventually found a good selection of hydraenids and elmids in a clean stream. That evening in our hotel (the Lebed (Swan)) we decided to work into the Mavrovo national park the next day, ending up (we hoped) at the starting point for a final sortie into the mountains. But first an evening on the town! Ohrid town is a

fascinating place – like a sort of east European version of the towns on the Italian subalpine lakes. Among other specialities it offers “Ohrid pearls”, made, we read, from the scales of one of the endemic fishes. I imagined some sort of small spherical scales, but no, they come in all shapes and sizes, clearly an amalgam many scales. How they are made we did not discover, but they are very good, and David and I both bought necklaces for our wives, and Lizzie also got one. These are definitely a success, much worn by their owners, and much admired by others!

Next day, Thursday, we drove into the Mavrovo park. Very beautiful, and with the small mountain roads very good. We stopped by a small river (the Gari) where David found *Gyrinus colymbus* – the real thing, with small cut-like marks on the elytra and known in Britain only as a Postglacial fossil. Late afternoon saw us at the hotel Srna (the Roebuck), where we telephoned Jovan. The news was not entirely good – the police refused us permission because there had, apparently, been recent trouble with bandits. The police had also added that anyway the whole area was very dry! Jovan suggested that he could take us to another of the western Šar Planina lakes, Bogovinsko Ezero, adding that this was also not a very long trek. An excellent suggestion and we agreed to meet the next morning (not too early!) at the Petrol Company Hotel. So, we spent the night at the Roebuck (an excellent bar decorated with stuffed animal heads on shields, and other hunting trophies), then drove up to our rendezvous. Bogovinsko lake is near to, and similar to, the Black Lake, and it too had the *Stictotarsus*, but in even smaller numbers. However, it had several specimens of the montane dung beetle *Aphodius limbolarius* floating on it, and David also got a number of the recently described *Hydroporus macedonicus* nearby, as well as *Limnebius truncatellus*, which seems to be a new record for the southern Balkans. So, another good day, but sadly it was now time to say goodbye to Jovan and his friends, and the next day we flew home. I took the opportunity to buy a tin of Fisherman’s Friends in the duty-free shop in the airport to avoid the progressive disintegration of the paper packets in my pocket as the winter term wears on!



The return from Livadica. Jovan without a net, the lake in the right-hand background



Dinner in the Ljuboten hut. Betty beside Lizzie, Mitko standing (right). Jovan’s picture of the lake is behind me, on the right

So there it was. A good and very enjoyable trip. A pity about *S. macedonicus* at Livadica Lake, but such is life. The beetle was so scarce generally (four specimens in Black Lake and only two in Bogovinsko) that maybe the real surprise was that it was so abundant the previous year in Karanikoličko Ezero. I got good chromosome preparations from this year’s material, and reviewing all the material I think that *S. macedonicus* is almost certainly the same as my Cretan material, in which case *S. macedonicus* would replace *S. creticus*. This is still to confirm, but if true would give

two Balkan species with extensive north-south distributions, *S. riberae* in the east (Bulgaria to Anatolia) and *S. macedonicus* further west. Livadica Lake is at the extreme eastern end of the Šar Planina, about 30 km east of Karanikoličko Ezero, and there is no further suitable high ground to the east of it until the Bulgarian mountains. It is therefore extremely unlikely that the Livadica material is different from that in the other Šar Planina lakes.

Received February 2008

PAS DE CALAIS

This is a privately produced document that lists the 187 water beetle species of the Pas de Calais and has 36 colour photographs of beetles and 16 of habitats. Amongst the more interesting species are *Haliphus varius* Nicolai, *H. fulvicollis* Erichson, *H. furcatus* Seidlitz, *Ilybius neglectus* (Erichson), *Bidessus grossepunctatus* Vorbringer, *Laccobius obscuratus* Rottenberg, *Hydraena assimilis* Rey, *H. rugosa* Mulsant, *Limnebius atomus* Duftschmid, and *Augyles hispidulus* (Kiesenwetter).

LOHEZ D 2007. *Coléoptères aquatiques du Nord de la France (Nord –Pas de Calais – Somme)*. Société entomologique du Nord de la France.

RHÔNE RECONSTRUCTIONS

Gilles Carron's summary is reproduced here as it cannot be bettered. An inventory was established for adult water beetles on seven sites of four cut-off lateral channels in the upper Rhône floodplain near Belley (Ain, Savoie), in 2004 and 2005. Overall, 89 species were collected, accounting for up to 75% of the species known to that region. *Laccobius albipes* Kuwert, *Haliphus mucronatus* Stephens, *H. fulvus* (Fab.), *Bidessus delicatulus* (Schaum), *Laccobius sinuatus* Motschulsky, *Ochthebius crenulatus* Jäch and *Agabus brunneus* (Fab.) were among the rarest species on a regional scale. Sampling sites contained between 12 and 63 species. The pond-like (disconnected) appearance, the good quality of the ground water, the surrounding rather natural landscape, the presence of well vegetated gently-sloping margins and the very low densities of fishes were positive factors. The effect of the restoration measures was evaluated on one site which was completely refreshed during the winter of 2004-2005. The following spring, the community was found to be severely reduced but then recovered very quickly. This could be explained by the high mobility of these insects and the presence of reservoir-populations nearby. Sites along the channels with steep margins contained few species. Restoration measures should include, besides the re-digging of continuous, flowing lateral channels, the digging of series of isolated, permanent or temporary ponds.

CARRON G, PAILLEX A & CASTELLA E 2007. Les coléoptères aquatiques de la zone alluviale du Rhône à Belley (France: Ain, Savoie): inventaire et observations préliminaires sur les effets de mesures de restauration. *Mitteilungen der schweizerischen entomologischen Gesellschaft. Bulletin de la Société entomologique Suisse* **80** 191-210.

CRIMEAN HYDROPHILOIDEA

Many species of Hydrophiloidea are added to the list for Crimea and two, *Berosus guttalis* Rey and *Laccobius striatulus* (Fab.), are removed. *Enochrus nigratus* (Sharp) and *Helochaeres lividus* (Forster) are also new for the Ukraine.

RYNDEVICH S K 2007. Beetles of superfamily Hydrophiloidea (Coleoptera: Helophoridae, Hydrochidae, Spercheidae, Hydrophilidae) of the Crimean peninsula. *Russian Entomological Journal* **16** (3) 273-279.