

Big Backyard Beetles: survival in highly-modified habitats

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As a child, one of the factors that pushed me into a life-long obsession with insects was the ready availability of a number of ground-dwelling beetles of reasonable size in my family home back yard in Timaru. The second factor was an aunt who sent me the small Reed Nature in New Zealand guide Native Beetles, by D. Manson. These factors combined sent me spiralling downwards at the tender age of 11 into the murky depths of entomophilia. Although I now cast my eyes further afield during collecting trips, I still pause from more mundane gardening and home maintenance tasks to see if there's anything under rocks or old timber. Following is a list of native species that have shown up in suburban Timaru over the years. Timaru and the surrounding countryside have been highly-modified over the last 100 or so years with very little original vegetation remaining. Despite this, a number of large ground-dwelling beetle species have remained, sometimes in large numbers.

Carabidae

Neocicindela dunedensis

Very common in some untended gardens or bare patches of land in parks as evidenced by the presence of larval holes. The larger *N. latecincta* is common on clay banks in wasteland or parks.

Mecodema brittoni

This species is found in and around Timaru and Geraldine. It appears to favour scrubby open areas in the countryside, which probably accounts for its success in Timaru gardens. I've encountered it wandering the streets on occasions. I note that this species is listed with others for which little knowledge about its distribution is known (Klimaszewski and Watt 1997). I regard that it is not at risk given the numbers that I have encountered at various South Canterbury sites.

M. rectolineatum

I've seen some recognisable remains of this species found in a Timaru garden. Otherwise it appears to be restricted to forest remnants in the foothills.

Metaglymma abberans

This species is quite common in Timaru, and I suspect it may reach its northern limits around here. Further north behind Geraldine it is replaced

by *M. monilifer* which often occurs in the company of the larger *Megadromus antarcticus*. *Megadromus antarcticus* is doing quite nicely in riverbed plantings, pine plantations and shelter belts throughout Mid Canterbury, as well as Christchurch gardens.

Megadromus temukensis

This locally-widespread scrub and forest dweller occurs on the outskirts of Timaru and, appropriately, in several Temuka gardens.

Megadromus sp.

This is a large and as yet undescribed South Canterbury endemic. It appears to be distributed from Timaru and Pareora north to Peel Forest, and appears to undergo quite noticeable clinal variation in the Geraldine area. It is common in native forest remnants, but also occurs in scrub, riverbed plantings and some Timaru gardens.

Holcaspis angustula

This smaller beetle is common in a variety of habitats including local gardens.

Tenebrionidae

Mimopeus opacula

This large tenebrionid is very common in gardens, as well as scrub areas further afield. It can vary in size, even within a specific population.

M. rugosus

This apparently central and north Otago species is represented by one rather flattened, mutilated yet recognisable specimen which I scraped off a concrete path some years ago. Subsequent searching of the same property has not revealed anything further.

Colydiidae

Enarsus sp

This smaller cryptic species seems common enough in moist parts of the garden where it occurs under wood or in leaf litter. I'm not entirely sure of the species; it is probably *bakewelli* although there appears to be some variety in size and colouration.

The above list indicates that at least some of our larger natives have managed to survive the past 120 years of development with some success. I would be intrigued to see if other modified suburban areas have similar faunas.

Reference

Klimaszewski, J. and Watt, J. C.

1997 Coleoptera: a Review of Families

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