

**MITES OF THE GENUS *NEONANORCHESTES* McDANIEL & BOLEN
1981 TURN FOOTPRINTS RED ON OTAGO BEACHES DURING
SUMMER (ACARI: PROSTIGMATA)**

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In January and February of this year I received several requests to identify microscopic mites that appear each year on certain Dunedin beaches, including Long Beach and Warrington Beach. The mites fill depressions and cause them to appear bright red.

The effect is spectacular. Wheel marks left by a four wheel drive vehicle appeared as two, parallel, red lines. Foot prints appeared as though filled with blood.

One man wrote: "At Long Beach I collected handfuls of what looked like red paint, except that it was moving. Looking behind me, I saw I'd left a trail of red footprints. What is it?"

I went out to Long Beach and saw for myself that the situation was exactly as it had been reported. The mites occur in huge numbers from just above the high tide level to the seaward base of the foredune. They fill depressions in the surface many layers of mites deep. Colour photographs I took show pools of bright scarlet that resemble red paint on grey sand. I collected hundreds of thousands of microscopic mites. The mites measured 150 μm across and 300 μm in length and have mouth-parts adapted for eating vegetable material. The bodies were light red and the legs very bright red.

In previous summers, I have found lesser numbers of these mites on Long Beach and on Warrington Beach.

They appear to be an undescribed species in the genus *Neonanorches* McDaniel & Bolen 1981 (Prostigmata: Nanorchestidae), of which only two species have been described, both from Padre Island, Texas, U.S.A. (McDaniel and Bolen, 1981).

In previous summers, I have found lesser numbers of these mites on Warrington Beach and Long Beach, and other East Otago beaches.

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REFERENCES

McDaniel, B. and Bolen, E. G. 1981. A new genus and two new species of Nanorchestidae from Padre Island, Texas (Acari: Prostigmata). *Acarologia* 22(3):253-256.