

**FIRST RECORD OF EUCINETIDAE (COLEOPTERA) FROM THE MALTESE ISLANDS**David Mifsud<sup>1</sup>**ABSTRACT**

The beetle family Eucinetidae, locally represented by *Nycteus meridionalis* (Laporte), is recorded for the first time from the Maltese Islands. Brief notes on the systematics, biology and distribution of Eucinetidae are included.

**INTRODUCTION**

A good deal of systematic work on the Coleoptera of the Maltese Islands has been carried out. Despite this, however, our present knowledge is still not sufficient to provide a clear picture of most species inhabiting this archipelago. Caruana Gatto (1894) published a list of common beetles and later co-authored (Cameron & Caruana Gatto, 1907) a list of Coleoptera occurring in the Maltese Islands. The latter still remains the only work dealing with all Coleoptera families. Since then, several families have been reviewed by a number of authors, mostly based on recent collections (cf Mifsud, 2000).

**THE EUCINETIDAE**

The family Eucinetidae, was never previously recorded from the Maltese Islands. It is included in the superfamily Scirtoidea (=Eucinetoidae), which comprises three other families: Clambidae, Decliniidae and Scirtidae (Lawrence & Newton, 1995). The entire group is characterized by adults having a relatively small pronotum, highly reduced prosternum, and a compaction mechanism involving the opisthognathous head resting against the procoxae or in some cases the meso- or metathorax. Distinguishing features of adult Eucinetidae include a streamlined elliptical body and the ability to jump using their modified hind legs. Sucking mouthparts appear to have evolved on several occasions in this family.

The Eucinetidae are represented worldwide by about thirty described species, currently accommodated in eight genera: *Bisaya* (Central Asia), *Eucilodes* (Eurasia), *Eucinetus* (widespread), *Euscaphurus* (western North America), *Jentozkus* (New World), *Nycteus* (widespread), *Subulistomella* (Japan) and *Tohlezkus* (Turkey and Finland). The Palearctic species of *Eucinetus* Germar were revised by Vit (1985) who recognised two species groups on the basis of adult morphology: the *haemorrhoidalis* group represented by the single species *haemorrhoidalis* (Germar) and the

*meridionalis* group represented by *bicolor* Reitter, *hopffgarteni* Reitter, *meridionalis* (Laporte) and *rugosus* Portevin. Until recently, *Nycteus* Latreille was in synonymy with *Eucinetus*. This synonymy was removed and the taxa in the *meridionalis* species group (Vit, 1985) were transferred from *Eucinetus* to *Nycteus* (Vit, 1999). Six other taxa (with distribution outside the Palearctic) were also transferred from *Eucinetus* to *Nycteus*, and two new species were described, *N. falsus* Vit, distributed from Arizona to Mexico, and *N. wollastoni* Vit from the Canary Islands.

Little is known about the biology of these beetles, but most records result from collections made in leaf litter. In some cases it has been asserted that these insects feed on spores of slime moulds [Myxomycetes (= Mycetozoa)] or on the fruiting bodies of basidiomycete fungi (Boletaceae, Coniophoraceae) (Wheeler & Hoebeke, 1984).

*Nycteus meridionalis* (Laporte de Castelnau, 1836)  
(Fig. 1)

**Material examined.** MALTA, Tal-Munxar (St. Thomas Bay), 1 ex., under stone on rubble wall, 18.iii.1996, leg. D. Mifsud; Zejtun, 1 ex., 30.xi.1997, leg. D. Mifsud (material is deposited in the author's private collection).

**Distribution.** Madeira, Spain, France, Corsica and Italy (Vit, 1985).

**Notes.** *N. meridionalis* is a new record for the Maltese Islands. In other European parts, *N. meridionalis* was recorded from under bark of *Pinus*, in leaf litter of *Eucalyptus* and in dried debris of *Opuntia* (Vit, 1985).

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank Mr. Roland Mühlethaler (NLU-Institut, Universität Basel, Switzerland) for kindly taking the photo of *Nycteus meridionalis* (Laporte).

(Accepted 19<sup>th</sup> October 2001)

<sup>1</sup> Ministry for Agriculture & Fisheries, Research & Development Centre, Ghammieri, Marsa, Malta.

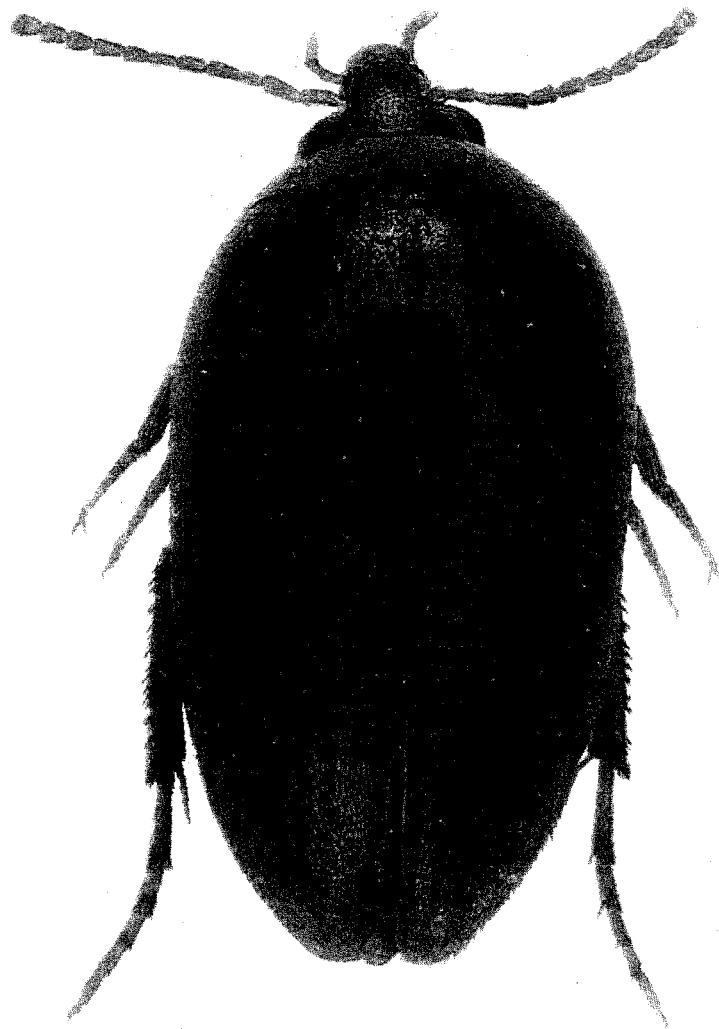


Fig. 1 *Nycteus meridionalis* (Laporte de Castelnau, 1836) (x 32)

## REFERENCES

- Caruana Gatto, A. (1894). Common beetles of the Maltese Islands. *The Mediterranean Naturalist*, 14 pp.
- Cameron, M. & Caruana Gatto, A. (1907). A list of the Coleoptera of the Maltese Islands. *The Transactions of the Entomological Society of London*, 59 (3): 383-403.
- Lawrence, J. F. & Newton, Jr. A. F., (1995). Families and subfamilies of Coleoptera (with selected genera, notes, references and data on family-group names) pp. 779-1006. In Pakaluk, J. & Ślipiński, S. A. (eds.) *Biology, Phylogeny, and Classification of Coleoptera: Papers Celebrating the 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday of Roy A. Crowson*. Museum i Instytut Zoologii PAN, Warszawa.
- Mifsud, D. (2000). Present knowledge of the Entomofauna of the Maltese Islands. *Entomologica Basiliensia*, 22: 75-86.
- Vit, S. (1985). Etude de la morphologie des espèces paléarctiques du genre *Eucinetus* Germar et quelques remarques sur son utilisation taxonomique (Coleoptera Eucinetidae). *Revue suisse de Zoologie*, 92: 421-460.
- Wheeler, Q. D. & Hoebeke, R. E. (1984). A review of mycophagy in the Eucinetoidae (Coleoptera), with notes on an association of the eucinetid beetle, *Eucinetus oviformis*, with a Coniophoraceae fungus (Basidiomycetes: Aphyllophorales). *Proceedings of the Entomological Society of Washington*, 86: 274-277.