

The Pill Woodlouse, *Armadillidium vulgare*, at one-time horticultural nursery sites on Bute

Glyn and Dawn Collis
Seasgair, Ascog, Isle of Bute.

In our previous paper on the woodlice of Bute (Collis & Collis, 2004) we speculated that the Pill Woodlouse, *Armadillidium vulgare*, might be among additional species that would be found on Bute. This species owes its common name to its habit of rolling into a ball when disturbed, though this characteristic is shared to a greater or lesser degree with other species of woodlice and also with the Pill Millipede *Glomeris marginata*. It is one of the five most common woodlice in the south of England, but its distribution becomes increasingly coastal as one moves further north.

In May 2005, Becky and Sue Hothersall alerted us to the presence of the Pill Woodlouse in their front garden in Wyndham Road, Ardbeg, and the following year David and Christine Peveril helped us find it in their garden in nearby Wyndham Park. Subsequently we found it on the perimeter of Ardbeg Bowling Green.

David Peveril mentioned that there had once been horticultural glasshouses in this area of Ardbeg, information which was expanded upon by Moira Gibbs and other sources. We had already come across an association between the Pill Woodlouse and horticultural nurseries and glasshouses in the Garrion Bridge/Crossford area of the Clyde Valley which is unusual in Scotland as a non-coastal location for this species. At the time we lived there (late 1970s and early 1980s) commercial tomato growing was still active in that area and we found the Pill Woodlouse at a number of locations in and around glasshouses (Collis & Collis, 1978). We therefore began to search other areas of Rothesay where there had once been nurseries.

We started with the site of Listers Nursery which was on Barone Road immediately south-west of the junction with The Meadows. On the second visit there we found a single specimen. Subsequently we found the species on the north-east side of that road junction and in greater numbers in the adjacent derelict area that was once part of the gasworks. We have also searched two other locations where there were once glasshouses: the area around the Creamery at Townhead and the area to the rear of the Health Centre on High Street. In neither case was our search successful. We have not found it anywhere else on Bute other than at the Ardbeg and Barone Road locations.

Our conjecture is that Pill Woodlice are associated with glasshouse/nursery sites because they were transported there by activities of the horticultural trade. For example, if crates or boxes of produce were sent from nurseries to a market, the crates may well have been returned for re-use, and not necessarily to the nursery from whence they came, so providing opportunities for the transport of small invertebrates between different nurseries. We note that boxes and crates were much more likely to be re-used in the past than they are nowadays. Alternatively, the animals may have been transported in soil with live potted plants. It seems much less likely that Pill woodlice are found at old nursery sites because they needed the warmth of glasshouses to survive, otherwise they would not have persisted for so long at the Bute sites, nor at sites on the nearby mainland.

Bute is the only Scottish Island where the Pill Woodlouse is known to be present (Gregory, in press). On the nearby mainland there are recent records from Clydebank, Fairlie, Troon, Prestwick, Auchincruive, Dalrymple, Culzean, Girvan, and Pinbain Bridge near Lendalfoot (Collis, 2007) and most recently we have found it in Largs. Two of these sites have horticultural connections: Culzean and Auchincruive. The majority of the other sites mentioned are on the shoreline but there are long stretches of apparently suitable shoreline habitat where the species is not found. It is plausible that Pill Woodlice arrived at some of these sites by being dumped there in garden rubbish or rubble. The same may also apply to sites close to railway lines as at Troon Station and one

of the Clydebank sites described by Futter (1998). Shorelines and land beside railways both tend to be regarded as appropriate places to deposit materials such as garden waste and “clean” rubble which are still widely (but erroneously) considered to be non-threatening to the environment.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to Sue and Becky Hothersall and to David and Christine Peveril for drawing to our attention the sites in Ardbeg, thanks also to Moira Gibbs, Jean McMillan, Jess Sandeman and many other people who have shared with us their knowledge of historical nursery sites in Rothesay.

References

- Collis, G.M. & Collis, V.D. (1978). Some recent records of woodlice (slaters) with particular reference to the Clyde area. *Glasgow Naturalist*, 19 (5) 385-389.
- Collis, G.M. & Collis, V.D. (2004). Woodlice and waterlice on Bute. *Transactions of the Buteshire Natural History Society*, 26, 60-64.
- Collis, G.M. (2007). Report on the 2006 BMIG meeting in Ayrshire. *Bulletin of the British Myriapod & Isopod Group*, 22, 32-35.
- Futter, S. (1998). Pill woodlouse *Armadillidium vulgare* in Clydebank. *Glasgow Naturalist*. 23 (3) 62-63.
- Gregory, S.J. (in press). *Woodlice and waterlice (Isopoda: Oniscidea & Asellota) in Britain and Ireland*. Field Studies Council, Preston Montford.