George Beccaloni PhD is the former Curator of Cockroaches & Their Relatives at the Natural History Museum (London) and creator of Cockroach Species File*. George is appealing for UK cockroach specimens to help improve our knowlegde of UK cockroach distributions and diversity. In the article below George outlines the current situation and how you can help.*

- Email George Beccaloni for more information or to arrange specimen submission

How many cockraches species are there in the UK? A cockroach conundrum

Until recently the UK had only 3 known resident cockroaches which live outdoors (*Ectobius lapponicus* (Dusky Cockroach), *E. pallidus* (Tawny Cockroach) and *Capraiellus panzeri* (Lesser Cockroach)). Then in September 2011, I collected what turned out to be *Planuncus tingitanus* (Variable Cockroach) in Hythe, Kent (published 2013), which was more recently found in Upminster and may now be widespread. Since then two other species have turned up: *Ectobius vittiventris* (Garden Cockroach) in 2017 in Hertfordshire (identified 2018), and *E. montanus* (Italian Cockroach) in 2015/2018 in Dungeness, Kent (identified 2020).

Recently there has been a suggestion of either a seventh species, or the possibility that one of the native species is misidentified. I have also seen photos of other possibly unrecorded species (e.g. from the Channel Islands and Isle of Wight), but specimens are needed for identification, since characters like the tergal gland and genitalia of the male need to be examined.

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There is no guide for differentiating the 6/7 species and the recent colonists can be confused with the native species. Very few people in the world can accurately identify all of them. Since they cannot currently be determined from photos, specimens are needed to sort out the confusion. The plan is to acquire samples of cockroaches of all species from across the southern half of Britain (they have not been recorded in the north) and hopefully offshore islands like the Scilly Isles and Channel Islands; to identify them as far as possible; and to then send a subset of specimens which need further detailed investigation to the world expert on this group in Germany.

This will ultimately result in the distributions of the species being better known (especially those of the recent colonists), a guide to identify them will be produced, and perhaps even other species new to the UK will be found.

How can you help? UK cockroaches wanted!

We need the help of naturalists across the southern UK to collect specimens and now is the best time of the year for them (late October/November is probably too late). The best method I know to collect them is to beat vegetation (e.g. dense clusters of ivy on walls, tall clumps of grass, dense conifers etc.) onto a beating tray, white sheet, umbrella, or into an insect net. The cockroaches will be obvious as they run fast!

They should be collected individually into small tubes and then either sent alive, or preserved in 70-80% IDA (industrial denatured alcohol), to my home address (email for details) in an uncrushable container inside a box or padded envelope. Ideally I need 3 pairs of adults and if possible oothecae (note that adults of all species have wings, at least vestigial ones; nymphs do not have wings and are generally not useful). Less or more specimens are obviously very

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welcome.

Please include the exact locality, habitat type, date, your name and also your email address so I can contact you. Please do not send me cockroaches from inside buildings, unless it's clear that they are not one of the well known pests! Please only send specimens if you wish to donate them to the project. A set will be given to London's Natural History Museum, others will be sent to the German expert for dissection and some will be kept by me for reference purposes. You will be credited for any information derived from your specimens, e.g. distributional data.

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Further reading (click on article title to open in separate window)

- **Discovery of '*tingitanus*': Bohn, H., Beccaloni, G., Dorow, W. H. O. & Pfeifer, M. A. 2013. Another species of European Ectobiinae travelling north – the new genus *Planuncus* and its relatives (Insecta: Blattodea: Ectobiinae). *Arthropod Systematics & Phylogeny*, 71(3): 139-168.**

- **Discovery of *vittiventris***

- **Discovery of *montanus***

- **Information about the 3 native species**

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