

08 June 2009

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RE: Update #7 on Insect Project.

We are now at the stage of our work that we are pulling traps from the first set of sites and moving them to the second series. This begins this week, and continues through next week.

We still have the BYU group here, and Dr. Clark has greatly increased the number of leaf beetles (his specialty, the family Chrysomelidae). All of the 6 previously recorded species in this group have been recollected, and the new number has surpassed 30 species. Montserrat has 36 recorded, and Dominica 51, so we hope to at least surpass 40 during our visit. However, many of these species are tiny and cryptic, so a real number will have to wait until after Dr. Clark can study our material in the lab after we finish the collecting.

We are beginning to zero in on species that we have so far failed to recollect. Foremost among these are 2 tiny ground beetles known only from a single collection by 2 Italian tourists collecting in Ravine Chabot in 1984. One of these species was made the basis of a new genus, one of 2 genera known only from St. Lucia. The technique they used is called soil washing, something I was taught to do when visiting Italy in 2006 and 2008. It involves putting soil in a bucket, pouring water in and mixing, then letting the organic matter, including insects, float to the surface where they are skimmed off, dried on newspapers, and then put in a Berlese funnel to extract the insects. Since these beetles are 1.0-2.2mm long, they can only be found when examining concentrated debris under the microscope.

Finding these 2 tiny endemic species is important because all but a single specimen are in private collections, where access by scientists is limited. Once we have seen the original habitat, perhaps we will have an easier time finding other populations.

Additional species we have not taken include the 2 largest species of beetles, *Dynastes hercules reidi* and the longhorn *Mallodon spinibarbis*, both of which have larvae that live in large, dead logs in forests, habitats that have generated dozens of species already. Species that live in soil and leaf litter are still underrepresented in what we have so far, and at least 4 previously recorded species from this habitat (beyond the Ravine Chabot species) have eluded us. Lastly, several aquatic species are still not among our samples, and another habitat that shows some gaps are beach inhabitants. These last 2 groups are not targets for our forest inventory work, so are of lower interest.

So, the main message is that we keep on sampling and adding species. It is like shoveling sand on the beach.