

SHORT COMMUNICATION

**Notes on the distribution and host plant
of *Ocladius paucisquamis* Meregalli & Colonnelli, 2006
(Curculionidae: Brachycerinae: Eirrhinini) in Israel**

ARIEL-LEIB-LEONID FRIEDMAN¹ & GIL WIZEN^{1,2}

¹The Steinhardt Museum of Natural History, Israel National Center for Biodiversity Studies,
Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv 69978, Israel. E-mail: laibale@tauex.tau.ac.il

²602-52 Park St. E, Mississauga, Ontario, L5G 1M1 Canada

The genus *Ocladius* Schoenherr, 1825 comprises 95 species of flightless ground-dwelling weevils with a black spherical body, which is almost bare or more or less covered by white scales. They are distributed in the Tropical Africa, Madagascar, Mediterranean Region, Arabian Peninsula and Central Asia, and are to be found in the Palaearctic Region predominantly in arid areas (Meregalli & Colonnelli 2006; Meregalli 2008; Oberprieler 2014). The biology of most of the species is unknown or poorly known; the Palaearctic species are associated mostly with Chenopodiaceae, although two Arabian species are recorded feeding on *Medicago* (Fabaceae) and *Reseda* (Resedaceae) (Meregalli & Colonnelli 2006; Meregalli 2008; Piñero 2013; Oberprieler 2014). Larval biology is not recorded for any Palaearctic species; in South Africa two species have been documented developing in stems of *Dianthus* (Caryophyllaceae) (Marshall 1937) and ovipositing into stems of *Cymbopogon* (Poaceae) (Howden 1986).

Ocladius paucisquamis Meregalli & Colonnelli, 2006 (Figs 2–5) is an endemic of Israel and Jordan, and the only species of this genus known from Israel so far. The original description states that its distributional range includes the Negev Desert in Israel and southern Jordan. No biological data were available at the time of description.

Since 2006, numerous specimens have been collected throughout Israel by us and our colleagues and friends (e.g. Oren Shelef, Elli Groner and Tal Mei-Dan), and now data about its distribution in Israel seem to be quite complete. *Ocladius paucisquamis* is widely distributed throughout the Negev Desert, from the Southern Coastal Plain to Eilat, the Judean Desert, and along the Jordan Valley from the southern Arava Valley, along the coast of the Dead Sea, as far north as Mt. Sartava (Fig. 1). It possibly occurs also in the Sinai Peninsula (Egypt), or at least in its northern and eastern parts, for it has been repeatedly found along the border between Israel and Egypt and because of the great ecological similarity of the areas on both sides of the border. This weevil occurs in different types of desert biotopes such as stony desert, sand and loess,

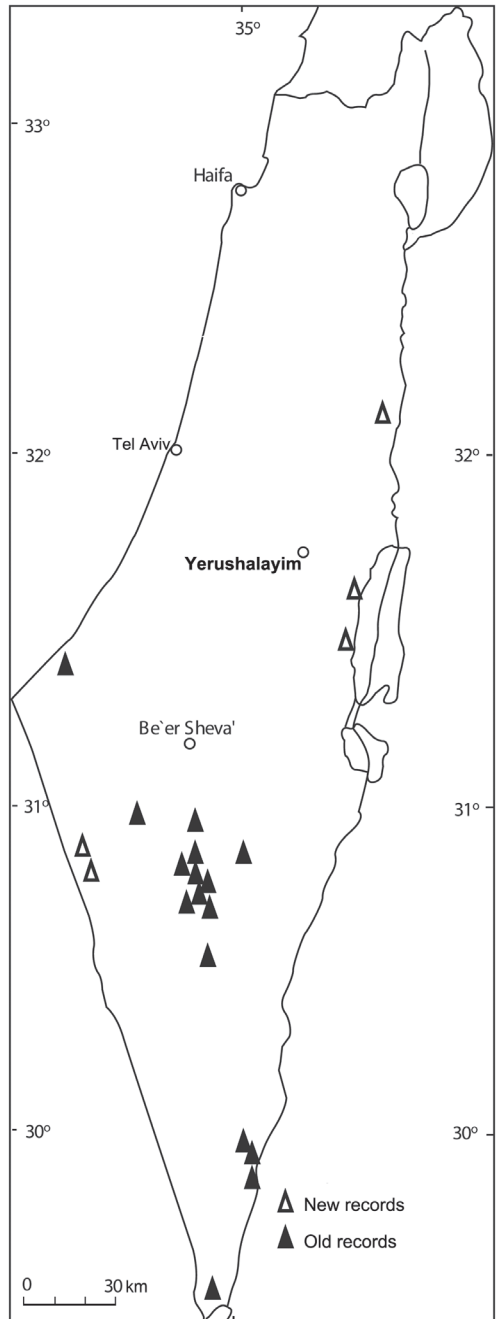


Fig. 1: Distribution of *Ocladius paucisquamis* in Israel.



Figs 2–4: (2, 3) *Ocladius paucisquamis* feeding on *Haloxylon scoparium*, 'Ezuz, and its close-up (courtesy Sarah Lavi); (4) *O. paucisquamis* active, Sede Boqer (courtesy Tal Mei-Dan).

dry riverbeds, but never in sandy dunes. During the daytime adults are frequently found under stones, laying on their side and feigning dead, with rostrum and tibia contracted and hidden in special channels of prosternum and femora respectively (Fig. 5). Usually two to five individuals occur in close proximity, but sometimes they are found in aggregations of tens of specimens. It is a very common species, albeit rarely observed due to the nocturnal activity of the adults. Specimens have often been found under various Chenopodiaceae (*Salsola* spp., *Haloxylon* spp.), as well as under Caryophyllaceae (*Gymnocarpus*) and Zygophyllaceae (*Zygophyllum* spp.), but no unequivocal association has been established.

In 2017 and 2018, adults of *O. paucisquamis* were observed and photographed several times by amateur naturalists (e.g. Sarah Lavi, Itzik Pop) in the north-west Negev, near the Egyptian border (Nizzana, 'Ezuz, Be'erotayyim), feeding on an unidentified Chenopodiaceae (Figs 2, 3). The observations were usually done early in the morning, at dawn. Following these observations, the senior author undertook a collecting trip in the northwestern Negev on 12–14.iii.2019 in order to find and eventually identify the host plant of *O. paucisquamis*. No specimens were seen during daytime, not even under stones, nor on any plant. At 9 pm adults of *O. paucisquamis* were found in large numbers, feeding actively on branches of *Haloxylon scoparium* Pomel (Chenopodiaceae) near Han Be'erotayyim in the riverbed of Nahal 'Ezuz (30°47'59.4"N 34°27'40.6"E). The collected specimens are deposited in the insect collection of the Steinhardt Museum of Natural History, Tel Aviv University, Israel (SMNHTAU).



Fig. 5: *Ocladius paucisquamis* feigning dead with contracted rostrum and tibiae. (Photo Gil Wizen)

Haloxylon scoparium is a very common plant in the shrub-steppes of the Northern and Western Negev and in the Negev Highlands, but is not recorded from the Jordan Valley (Danin & Fragman-Sapir 2019). Since the distribution of *O. paucisquamis* is wider than that of *H. scoparium*, it is almost sure that *O. paucisquamis* feeds on other chenopod species in other parts of its areal.

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