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MACROCHELES VERNALIS BERLESE, 1887: 
SUPPLEMENT TO THE DESCRIPTION OF MALE 
FROM MOROCCAN POPULATION 

J. NIOGRET & M. BERTRAND 1
(Accepted October 2005)

MACROCHELIDAE
MACROCHELES VERNALIS
MALE
GLABER GROUP
MOROCCO

INTRODUCTION

Macrocheles vernalis (Berlese, 1887) (= Holostaspis vernalis Berlese, 1887) was originally described from Italian specimens. This species was found common phoretic on several large scarab hosts: Gymmopleurus azureus Fabr., G. caffer Fahr., G. unicolor Fahr., Scarabaeus affinis Brulle, S. carinatus Gebl., S. cristatus Fabr., S. gangeticus Cast., S. pius (Illiger), S. puncticollis Latr., S. sacer L., S. semipunctatus Fabr. (ÉVANS & HYATT, 1963, CICOLANI, 1983). The distribution of M. vernalis extends from far East (Armenia, Turkmenistan and China) to Mediterranean Basin (Fig. 1) and has been reported from both Palaeartic and Ethiopian regions (respectively France, Italy, Greece, Romania and Arabia, Liberia, Uganda, Senegal and Nigeria) (EVANS & HYATT, 1963). We collected it recently from Morocco (HALOTI et al., 2004). Few data are available on the morphology of the male gender, though it provides useful characters for sibling species recognition, when the females are not or hardly recognizable by conspicuous characters.

Male M. vernalis is described here for the first time about one century after female description. This note participates in the study of the coprophilious macrochelids around the Western Mediterranean Basin.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Phoretic females of M. vernalis were collected alive from the ventral surface of the roller beetle Scarabaeus sacer L. Dung beetles were collected in April...
2004 in the Mamora forest (34°13N; 6°30W) (Morocco). Females were reared under laboratory conditions in individual cylindrical plastic boxes (84 × 54 mm) and fed with nematodes present in cattle dung. Progeny was filled and conserved in 70% ethanol, cleared 24 hours in lactic acid, and dissected under stereoscopic microscope. Specimens were mounted either on temporary or permanent slides with lactic acid and Hoyer’s medium. Observations were made with a microscope (Leitz Dialux 20 EB). Measures: a 480 Motic digital Camera driven with Motic Image Plus software 2.0 was used for all measurements.

Type material: Five individuals are deposited in the Muséum national d’Histoire naturelle de Paris (France). Other specimens in the laboratory collections, Montpellier (France).
Fig. 2-3. *M. vernalis*. 2a. — male dorsal shield; 2b. — female dorsal shield, detail; 2c. — male, ventral view

**MALE DESCRIPTION**

Family *Macrochelidae* Vitzthum, 1930
Genus *Macrocheles* Latreille, 1829
*Holostaspis vernalis* Berlese, 1887
*Macrocheles vernalis*, Evans & Hyatt, 1963, p. 375, figs 126-129

Male: dorsal shield length: 401-441 \( \mu m \) (n=3); maximal width: 250-267 \( \mu m \) (n=3). Body surface: yellowish brown.

Female: dorsal shield length: 610-777 \( \mu m \) (n=7); maximal width: 363-430 \( \mu m \) (n=7). Body surface: yellowish brown.

Male: Dorsal shield (Fig. 2) ornamental pattern with punctuated and irregular reticulations, punctuation and reticulation weakened medially; lateral and posterior margin irregularly crenulated; 28 pairs of dorsal setae; vertical setae \( j1 \) smooth, joined distally, bases \( j1 \) nearby; \( J5, Z5, S5, Z4 \) and \( Z2 \) pilose, others are simple. \( J5, Z5 \) and \( S5 \) are pilose for most of length; \( Z4, Z2 \) are distally pilose, \( r2 \) and \( r3 \) distally irregular.
Venter (Fig. 3): tritosternum well developed, with a pair of pilose lacinia. Sternoventral shield with 4 pairs of setae and 3 pairs of pores; all the setae simple; length 218-225 μm, maximal width between coxae II and III: 88-103 μm (n=2). Surface without ornamentation.

Genital orifice on anterior margin of the shield. Ventrial shield as wide as long (132-147 μm and 124-149 μm, respectively) (n=2); 3 pairs of preanal setae, one pair of paranal setae and one postanal seta; all the setae simple; surface with some concentric ornamentations attenuated in the central region. Cribrum forwarded by lateral paranal extensions. One ornamentations attenuated in the central region. Cri-setae, one pair of paranal setae and one postanal seta; 124-149 μm, respectively) (n=2); 3 pairs of preanal setae, one pair of paranal setae and one postanal seta; all the setae simple; surface with some concentric ornamentations attenuated in the central region. Cribrum forwarded by lateral paranal extensions. One ornamentations attenuated in the central region. Cri-setae, one pair of paranal setae and one postanal seta.

Gnathosoma (Fig. 4, 5): well developed and sclerotized. Three pairs of hypostomatic setae and one paracoxal; all the setae simple; deutosternal groove with 5 rows of denticles. Pulp chaetotaxy: trochanter, femur and genu 2-5-6 with 2 femoral and 3 tibial setae short and stout. Palptarsus with a tridift process, and complex of distal setae with 3 robust, curved and long olfactive setae. Epistome (Fig. 5) with a median process and a pair of lateral processes, glaber like; median lobe bifurcated distally. Chelicera: male fixed digit (Fig. 4) with two large teeth and two distal teeth, pilus dentilis, and a terminal hook. A dorsal seta, usual lyriform organs; movable digit with one large tooth, a terminal hook; spermatodactyl long and strongly curved, with large canal: length 55-57 μm (n=2); arthrodidal brush strongly pilose; movable digit length: 41-45 μm (n=2).

Legs (Fig. 6, 7): Tarsi II to IV with developed ambulacra and claws. Most of segments of every leg with simple setae, dorsal setae on leg IV pilose. Femur II with a large spur (Fig. 6); genu and tibia II setae with a small protuberance; femur IV with a setigerous ventral spur and non-setose posterolateral protuberance (Fig.7).

**Discussion**

Among Macrocheles genus, the glaber group becomes more and more heterogeneous due the large number of species clustered together. The species that were aggregated to this group (GLIDA & BERTRAND, 2003) have widened the range of glaber group charac-
ters. The glaber group was originally defined by FILIPPONI & PEGAZZANO (1962) including Macrocheles glaber (Müller), M. perglaber Filipponi & Pegazzano and M. scutatus (Berlese). To provide phylogenetic information, the group definition should be based on synapomorphies and sexual dimorphism allows discrimination and recognition between sibling species (e.g. M. glaber & M. perglaber). Consequently, the apomorphic characters are provided by the female gender (chelicerate teeth, characteristic epistome, procured line and sessile saccula). The ornamentation of sternal or dorsal shield of the female (which can be considered apomorphic) could be affected by adaptive processes, especially by the strength of the link with one preferential host and the host’s traits of life. Macrocheles vernalis female exhibits a masked procured line, glaber like epistome and sacculi, but ornamentation of the sternal shield lacks. This species could be considered as belonging to the glaber group sensu lato, the differences (apomorphies) could be the consequences of the specialization on large phorionts. This path was followed by the scutatus subgroup (WALTER & KRANTZ 1992).

All the widely distributed species belonging to the glaber group share analogous ecological preferences. Macrocheles vernalis differs from the opportunistic species by the preferential hosts (Scarabaeus and Gymnopleurus species). However even if the hosts are widely distributed, they are ecologically specialized: from fine sand dunes (Scarabaeus semipunctatus) to silty sand (S. scutatus and S. puncticollis) and silty clay soils (S. pius). We can speculate that the lack of morphological specific characters of the female of M. vernalis (poor ornamentation, lack of setae pilosity) could reveal a hidden diversity. The description of males (sibling species discriminating criterion) from geographically distant habitats is needed to test the homogeneity of the taxonomic level. Since the narrow definition of glaber group by FILIPPONI & PEGAZZANO (1962), it will be necessary to review its contours. Considering the morphological characters, M. vernalis can be integrated in the actual glaber group sensu lato. Specialization on large roller beetles may explain the derived characters (ie: weakness of sclerotization) analogous path followed by stenoxe-
nous species (ie: pisentii group). It corresponds to the definition given to the scutatus subgroup (WALTER &
Fig. 4-7: *M. vernalis*. 4. — Chelicera male (4a) and female (4b). 5. — Epistome. 6. — PII male femur and genu. 7. — PIV, femur lateral view.
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<tr>
<th>A — Male criterions of glaber-group</th>
<th>Male of M. vernalis</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Separate sternogenital and ventrianal shield</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V 3 to 6 pairs of ventrianal setae</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dorsal shield crenulated posteriorly</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>At least 28 pairs of setae</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Legs II and IV with ventral spurs</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<th>B — Females criterions of glaber group</th>
<th>Female of M. vernalis</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Ventrianal shield subtriangular, reticulate</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dorsal shield with procurved line</td>
<td>Medially masked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 pairs of dorsal setae</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sessile sacculi</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<th>C — scutatus subgroup</th>
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<tr>
<td>Reduction of ornamentation of sternogenital shields</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weakness of ventrianal ornamentation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ventrianal shield : length &gt; width</td>
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<tr>
<td>Metasternal shield narrow</td>
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Table 1: Glaber-group: common characters of species, and scutatus subgroup (from Krantz, 1981, Walter & Krantz, 1992)

Krantz 1992). This subgroup gathers both opportunistic and stenoxenous species, specialized on large Scarabaeini.

REFERENCES


