Zootaxa 3573: 55–58 (2012)
www.mapress.com/zootaxa/

Correspondence

ISSN 1175-5326 (print edition)
ZOOTAXA
ISSN 1175-5334 (online edition)

urn:lsid:zoobank.org:pub:096AD2D4-C328-4DAB-8CBD-929477A1DC86

Siraton devillei Hustache (Coleoptera: Curculionidae), the mysterious weevil from the Isle of Elba: exiled no longer

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Abstract

Siraton devillei Hustache, 1934, described from a single specimen collected on the island of Elba in Italy, is determined to be conspecific with the Australian cycad weevil *Melanotranes internatus* (Pascoe, 1870). Consequently, *Melanotranes* Zimmerman, 1994 is a new junior synonym of *Siraton* Hustache, 1934 and *Siraton devillei* Hustache, 1934 a new junior subjective synonym of *Tranes internatus* Pascoe, 1870, and *Siraton internatus* (Pascoe, 1870) and *Siraton roei* (Boheman, 1843) are new combinations. A summary of the composition and biology of the *Tranes* group of weevils is given, and the recorded instances of *S. devillei* appearing in Europe and the U.S.A. are listed, as well as those of the related cycad-boring *Demyrsus meleoides* Pascoe in Europe and Africa.

Key words: Molytinae, *Siraton*, *Melanotranes*, new synonymy, new combination, cycad weevils

In a large insect group such as weevils (superfamily Curculionoidea), with more than 60 000 described species (Oberprieler *et al*. 2007), it is not unusual to encounter species and even genera that are only known from their original description and type specimens (often only a single holotype) and have never or rarely been found again. Usually such species are small and described from remote areas in entomologically poorly explored or inaccessible regions or countries, but occasionally also species described from well populated and explored areas are exceedingly rare, as exemplified by Darwin's forgotten weevil in Western Australia (Oberprieler *et al*. 2010), possibly due to habitat loss. However, when such a species is both large and conspicuous and occurs in a country that is entomologically as well explored and studied as Italy, the failure to ever find it again can defy explanation even by taxonomic experts in that country.

Precisely such a case is presented by a weevil species described as *Siraton devillei* by Hustache (1934) from a single specimen apparently collected on the island of Elba in Central Italy. Alphonse Hustache (1872–1949) was a well-known French weevil taxonomist with a good knowledge of not only European but also of African and South American weevils, but he had obviously not seen any similar weevil when he described *Siraton devillei*. He compared it with the genus *Notaris* Germar and thus placed it in the subfamily Erirhininae, though noting that it also shows some similarities with *Lepyrus* Germar and *Paramecops* Schoenherr of Molytinae. Subsequently *Siraton* was always listed as a Palaearctic genus of Erirhininae (*e.g.*, Klima 1934; Pesarini 1978; Alonso-Zarazaga & Lyal 1999; Caldara 2011). No weevil taxonomist appears to have found or studied the species again, until a female specimen labelled as *Siraton devillei* by Adolphe Hoffmann was located in the Hoffmann collection of the Museum National d'Histoire Naturelle (MNHN) in Paris (Caldara & Diotti 2005). No specimen of *S. devillei* could be found in the Hustache collection in the MNHN, and although the female in the Hoffmann collection is labelled as having been collected in Kalamata, Greece, it is highly likely to be holotype of *S. devillei* as Hoffmann is known to have changed the labels of specimens transferred from Hustache's collection to his (Perrin 1998; Caldara & Diotti 2005). The source of Hoffmann's information regarding the possible true origin of the specimen is not known. Hustache (1934) wrote that he had obtained the single specimen a dozen years earlier from J. Sainte-Claire Deville, who had acquired it from G. Della Beffa, and it is possible that any proper collection data of the specimen were lost to Hustache in the process but that Hoffmann traced them later.

Caldara & Diotti (2005) could find no apparent affinity between this enigmatic species and any other Palaearctic ones, nor was it known to R. Thompson at the Natural History Museum in London or to G. Kuschel in New Zealand, who has studied erirhinines from all over the world. As no male of the species could be found to allow a study of the male

Accepted by R. Anderson: 17 Oct. 2012; published: 6 Dec. 2012