

Distribution and ecology of the Banks Peninsula Tree Weta,
Hemideina ricta.

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Masterate of Science in Ecology at Massey University.



Adult male *Hemideina ricta* on tree stump,
Fishermans Bay, Banks Peninsula.

Jacqueline Anne Townsend
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Abstract

Comparative morphology. *Hemideina ricta* and *H. femorata* were assessed for their morphological similarity. *H. ricta* adults were found to have significantly longer and wider heads in both sexes and longer cerci in adult males. The tibial length of adult female *H. femorata* was significantly longer than in *H. ricta*. Thorax width, thorax length and ovipositor length did not differ significantly between the two species.

Habitat and distribution. *H. ricta* and *H. femorata* are predominantly allopatric on Banks Peninsula, with *H. ricta* being found on the outer eastern portion of Banks Peninsula and on the inner Akaroa Harbour while *H. femorata* is located on the inner Akaroa Harbour and westward from here. The two species overlapped altitudinally, but *H. femorata* was not found above 450 m asl whereas *H. ricta* was discovered from 20 m to 806 m asl. *H. femorata* showed a strong preference for kanuka habitat whilst *H. ricta* had a broader preference for kanuka, mixed broadleaved hardwoods, fallen totara and broadleaf logs and old fenceposts.

Refuge occupation. The refuges where *H. ricta* and *H. femorata* rested during the day were assessed for their similarity. Both species preferred galleries formed by beetle larvae as these probably offered the greatest protection from predators. Weta were also found in splits, under the bark of trees, in rotten logs and in the forks of trees. Significantly more galleries were occupied by *H. ricta* adults, compared to juveniles, that occupied areas under bark and in splits. There was no significant difference in the refuges occupied by adult and juvenile *H. femorata*.

Behaviour. The nocturnal behaviour of *H. ricta* in captivity and in the field was investigated. Their activity in captivity was significantly greater. *H. ricta* were observed moulting, ovipositing, mating and fighting in captivity whereas in the field none or only a few of these activities were recorded. *H. ricta* in captivity also spent more time perching on logs and foliage compared to field situations. It is probable that temperature influenced this result because *H. ricta* showed elevated activity and a greater variety of activity with increased temperature in the field.

Feeding preferences. The comparative feeding preferences of *H. ricta* and *H. femorata* were assessed on five commonly located mixed broadleaved hardwood tree species. *H. ricta* and *H. femorata* consumed significantly different amounts of the selected plants as did juvenile and adult weta. More *Parsonsia* was eaten by *H. ricta* and more *Pittosporum* was eaten by *H. femorata*. In addition, significantly more *Parsonsia* was consumed by adult male *H. ricta* compared to juvenile males. There was no significant difference between preferred plant between the sexes.

Table of contents

	Page
Acknowledgements	I
Abstract	II-III
Table of contents	IV
List of figures and tables	V-VI
 Chapter 1 - Introduction	 1-2
 Chapter 2 - The comparative morphology of two neighbouring tree weta species, <i>Hemideina ricta</i> and <i>H. femorata</i> (Orthoptera: Stenopelmatidae), on Banks Peninsula, South Island, New Zealand.	 3-29
 Chapter 3 - The distribution and habitat preferences of <i>H. ricta</i> and its association with <i>H. femorata</i> on Banks Peninsula.	 30-51
 Chapter 4 - The refuge occupation of <i>H. ricta</i> and <i>H. femorata</i> .	 52-65
 Chapter 5 - Field and captive behavioural activity patterns of <i>H.</i> <i>ricta</i> .	 66-91
 Chapter 6 - Comparative feeding preferences of <i>H. ricta</i> and <i>H.</i> <i>femorata</i> in captivity.	 92-103
 Chapter 7 - Discussion and recommendations.	 104-109
 References	 110-114

List of figures, plates and tables

	Page	
Table 2.1	7	Difference in morphological features found between <i>H. ricta</i> and <i>H. femorata</i> .
Table 2.2	10	The retrolateral and prolateral apical spines of the hind tibia of <i>Hemideina</i> species on Banks Peninsula.
Table 2.3	10	Average measurements of known instars of <i>H. ricta</i> .
Table 2.4	11	<i>t</i> test on the differences between sexes.
Table 2.5	26	<i>t</i> tests on differences between species.
Plate 2.1	8	Photo of <i>H. ricta</i> showing typical colouration, with pale morph for comparison.
Plate 2.2	9	Photo of hybrid adult male.
Fig. 2.1 a-d	12-	Comparison of male and female morphological measurements.
Fig. 2.2 a-d	16-	Morphological differences of males between species.
Fig. 2.3	20	Drawings of male <i>H. ricta</i> , <i>H. femorata</i> and hybrid.
Fig. 2.4 a-e	21-	Morphological differences of females between species.
Table 3.1	35	The density of species in the 10 x 10 m plots.
Table 3.2	40	Number of <i>Hemideina</i> species located in vegetation types.
Table 3.3	45	Aspect of land where each species was found.
Plate 3.1	36	Photo of habitat where <i>H. ricta</i> was located in rocks.
Plate 3.1	37	Photo of gorse and fencepost habitat.
Fig. 3.1	32	Map of Banks Peninsula illustrating the grids surveyed and not surveyed.
Fig. 3.2	34	Distribution of <i>H. ricta</i> and <i>H. femorata</i> and areas surveyed where no weta were found on Banks Peninsula.
Fig. 3.3	38	Altitudinal range of <i>H. ricta</i> and <i>H. femorata</i> on Banks Peninsula.
Fig. 3.4	39	Tree species and habitat types where weta were found.
Fig. 3.5	41	Number of <i>H. femorata</i> and <i>H. ricta</i> , found in each habitat type over the altitudinal range.
Fig. 3.6	42	Refuges found per tree over the altitudinal range.
Fig. 3.7	43	Plots sampled over the altitudinal range.

Fig. 3.8a	44	Aspect (slope and direction) of land where all plots were sampled.
Fig. 3.8b	44	Aspect (slope and direction) where <i>H. ricta</i> and <i>H. femorata</i> were found.
Table 4.1	54	The percentage of weta found in each refuge category.
Table 4.2	55	Number of potential refugia in different tree species.
Table 4.3	58	The taxa found per tree and log refuges.
Table 4.4	60	Number of weta found in artificial refuges and by survey searching.
Fig. 4.1	56	The aspect of refuge entrances of both species of weta.
Fig. 4.2	57	Height off ground of refuges of all weta.
Fig. 4.3	59	Average weta per tree by availability of refuges per tree.
Fig. 4.4	61	The duration and occupancy of <i>H. ricta</i> in artificial refuges.
Table 5.1	78	Field observations at Hinewai Reserve and captive observations at Palmerston North, of <i>H. ricta</i> activity.
Table 5.2	87	The egg weight, length, and number oviposited by 5 female <i>H. ricta</i> in autumn 1993.
Plate 5.1	80	Photo of <i>H. ricta</i> mating positions.
Fig. 5.1	71	Activity patterns of <i>H. ricta</i> with increased temperature.
Fig. 5.2	72	The abundance of each sex by temperature.
Fig. 5.3	73	Total variety of activity by temperature.
Fig. 5.4a-d	74-	The monthly activity of <i>H. ricta</i> in the field.
Fig. 5.5	77	Seasonal temperature fluctuations over the months sampled.
Fig. 5.6a-c	82-	The monthly activity of <i>H. ricta</i> in captivity.
Fig. 5.7	86	Comparison of female weta weight and the weight of eggs.
Table 6.1	98	The total amount of each plant consumed by both species.
Table 6.2	98	Results of ANOVA between species, sex and age of weta in selection of plants.
Fig. 6.1	95	Total amount of plants consumed by both species.
Fig. 6.2	96	Amount of plant consumed by males and females of each species.
Fig. 6.3	97	Amount of plant consumed by adult and juvenile weta of each species.
Fig. 6.4	99	Consistency of consumption of five plants throughout the trial.