

SHORTER CONTRIBUTIONS

Banisteria, Number 15, pages 49-50

© 2000 by the Virginia Natural History Society

LYTTA POLITA (SAY), A BLISTER BEETLE NEW TO THE VIRGINIA FAUNA (COLEOPTERA: MELOIDAE) -- The blister beetle genus *Lytta* is represented by a profusion of species in western United States, but only a few, all in the subgenus *Pomphopoea*, occur in the eastern states. These are big (up to 25 mm long), soft-bodied insects usually most active in the spring months, which frequently achieve nuisance status by consuming, in enormous numbers, the foliage and flowers of many kinds of plants. The genus was revised by Selander (1960) in a treatment that included lists of museum specimens and distribution maps. Of the four eastern species, Selander had seen Virginia material of only one, *L. aenea* Say, which generally occurs statewide. *Lytta sayi* LeConte occurs further north and west, and *L. unguicularis* (LeConte) is recorded no closer to Virginia than the mountains of western North Carolina.

The fourth eastern species, *L. polita* Say, has a distinctly austral distribution ranging from North Carolina to Louisiana and south through most of Florida. With the northernmost localities at Raleigh (Selander, 1960) and Washington (Brimley, 1938), North Carolina, the presence of *L. polita* in Virginia was very probable, and this likelihood has been confirmed in the past decade by surveys of both the Virginia Museum of Natural History and Virginia Division of Natural Heritage. Four instate localities can now be documented: *Isle of Wight Co.*: Zuni Pine Barrens and Blackwater Ecologic Preserve, ca. 7 km south of Zuni (10); *Mecklenburg Co.*: Elm Hill Wildlife Management Area (1); *Northampton Co.*: Savage Neck Natural Area Preserve, 5 km N of Cape Charles (1); *City of Virginia Beach*: Seashore/First Landing State Park (26). The Elm Hill locality is on the Piedmont, almost due north of Raleigh, and implies that the range of *L. polita* in southeastern Virginia may be more extensive than now known. The Savage Neck site is on the north side of the Chesapeake estuary, and is the new northernmost locality, some 135 miles/216 km north of Washington, North Carolina.

Virginia captures reflect the known vernal activity of this and related species. Eight specimens were trapped in late March, 22 in April, and only singles in May, June, July, and August. At Seashore State Park, pitfall arrays were operated simultaneously in three biotopes, of which the "dune" site yielded 26 specimens, "mesic", four specimens, and "scrub," only one. It is noteworthy that *L. polita* is unknown from elsewhere in Virginia

Beach despite the concurrent and subsequent operation of pitfall arrays in numerous other sites within a 20 mile/32 km radius of Seashore State Park, some of them in apparently very similar "dune" habitats.

Lytta polita is easily distinguished from the three other eastern species, being the only one in which the distal antennomeres are not enlarged, the pronotal disk is glabrous, and the pro- and mesotibiae (often the metatibiae as well) are black instead of orange. The elytra have a characteristic bronzy color, often tinged with purple or green.

Acknowledgments

The Virginia Museum of Natural History is much indebted to Natural Heritage zoologists Christopher A. Pague, Kurt A. Buhlmann, and Steven M. Roble for the gift of most of the material on which this note is based.

Literature Cited

Brimley, C. S. 1938. The Insects of North Carolina, Being a List of the Insects of North Carolina and Their Near Relatives. North Carolina Department of Agriculture, Division of Entomology, Raleigh. 560 pp.

Selander, R. B. 1960. Bionomics, Systematics, and Phylogeny of *Lytta*, a Genus of Blister Beetles (Coleoptera, Meloidae). Illinois Biological Monographs 28: 1-295.

Richard L. Hoffman
Virginia Museum of Natural History
Martinsville, Virginia 24112