

SHORTER CONTRIBUTIONS

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HEMIEPLUS MICROPHTHALMUS (SCHWARZ): A SPECIES AND GENUS OF ELONGATED BEETLES NEW TO THE FAUNA OF VIRGINIA (COLEOPTERA: MYCTERIDAE) – Ongoing faunistic inventories conducted in southeastern Virginia continue to disclose a wide variety of insects substantially north of their previously-known geographic ranges. The latest addition to this category of overlooked native Virginians is *Hemipeplus microphthalmus*, a small, flattened beetle with remarkably elongated abdomen, described by E. A. Schwarz (1878) from Enterprise, Florida, and subsequently found frequently in Florida and as single collections in Mississippi, Texas, and South Carolina (Thomas, 1985).

Discovery of this species in Virginia extends the known range along the coast some 300 miles/485 km north from Georgetown, South Carolina, and represents a new northernmost locality for this basically tropical genus, two other species of which occur in Florida and southern Georgia. Collection data for the specimen are:

Virginia: *City of Virginia Beach:* False Cape State Park, Wash Woods Trail, 0.3 km east of main park road, UV trap in live oak–loblolly pine dune woods, 2 August 2005, S. M. Roble and G. W. Wahl, III (VMNH).

Referring to the habits of this species in Florida, Thomas (1985) stated: “In contrast to the other two species of Florida *Hemipeplus*, this species does not seem to be associated with palmetto. Instead, it occurs on grasses of various kinds, dwelling between the closely appressed leaf bases and stem.” One host plant mentioned by Thomas was *Andropogon virginicus* L. (Poaceae) which is statewide in Virginia (Harvill et al., 1992). Attention directed specifically to this plant at False Cape should reveal the extent to which it is utilized by *H. microphthalmus* there, and elsewhere in the coastal regions of the state. Interestingly, *H. microphthalmus* is uniformly light yellow-tan and doubtless matches the color of *Andropogon* foliage closely. There is no evidence that the beetles actually feed on the plant tissue, and Thomas believed that they are scavengers on fungi and miscellaneous plant spores.

An interesting parallel modification of body form occurs in many laminiphilic species of the lygaeid subfamily Blissinae. For example, *Ischnodesmus falicus* (Say), a species that occurs in Virginia, is very flat and slender with the abdomen greatly elongated: 58% of the total body length (Hoffman, 1996: fig. 29). Insects adapted to life in the axils of grass blades are not

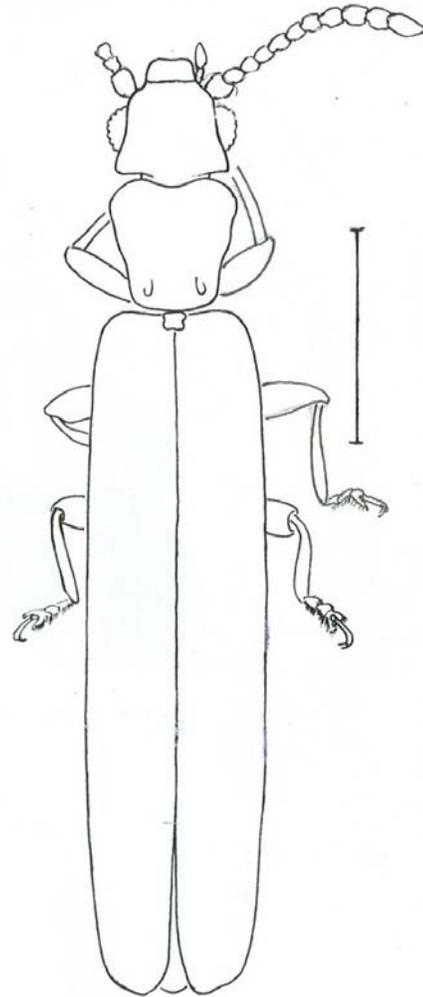


Fig. 1. *Hemipeplus microphthalmus*, dorsal aspect of specimen from False Cape State Park. Scale line = 1 mm.

frequently collected by conventional sweeping. Perhaps a quantity of the plants processed with a Berlese extraction funnel might yield more material of *H. microphthalmus*, as the species is not especially phototropic.

Because of the singular body form, *Hemipeplus* was until fairly recently (e.g., Arnett, 1963) placed in the family Cucujidae, a family with many flattened subcorticolous species. During that time it sometimes formed the basis of its own family, or was associated with a variety of beetle families. Thomas' (1985) review recounted in detail the taxonomic and nomenclatorial convolutions through which the genus has passed. Its current placement in the Mycteridae is predicated largely

upon larval characters: adult beetles of *Hemipeplus* and of *Mycterus* reflect few features in common beyond those of the entire order.

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