Fig. 1. *Heilipus apiatus* from First Landing State Park, City of Virginia Beach; body length = 14 mm (from base of beak to elytral apex) (photograph by Melody Cartwright, VMNH).

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HEILIPUS APIATUS, A STRIKING LARGE WEEVIL NEW TO THE VIRGINIA FAUNA (COLEOPTERA: CURCULIONIDAE)--Collecting beetles for the Virginia Museum of Natural History at First Landing (formerly Seashore) State Park, City of Virginia Beach, during the period of 23 June-7 July 2003, Robert Vigneault obtained three specimens of a large black weevil with extensive white elytral ornamentation. Another specimen from the same locality, collected by Kurt A. Buhlmann of the Virginia Natural Heritage Program in 1989, was found among unidentified material in the VMNH beetle collection.

Reference to the antique but still indispensable manual on the weevils of eastern North America (Blatchley & Leng, 1916) led to identification of the beetle as *Heilipus apiatus* (Olivier, 1807). As evident from the photograph (Fig. 1), this is a stately and impressive insect, unlikely to be mistaken for anything else, and in fact, there are no close relatives in North America although the genus is extravagantly represented by at least 328 nominal species in the Neotropical Region (Blackwelder, 1947).

Blatchley & Leng (1916) mentioned Florida, Tennessee, and Georgia as known states of record. More recent sources have added Florence and Walterboro, South Carolina (Kirk, 1969, 1970), and Raleigh, Windsor, and Southern Pines, North Carolina (Brimley, 1938); both of these authors used the junior synonym *Heilipus squamosus* LeConte.

Pin label data for North Carolina specimens in the North Carolina State University insect collection (kindly provided by Robert L. Blinn) reflect captures in the following counties and years: Bertie (1934), Brunswick (1954), Craven (1907), Dare (1961), Johnston (1976), Tyrell (1975), and Wake (1938). That these sites are all in the Coastal Plain is not surprising, a more interesting aspect of the data is the fact that no specimens of this large and conspicuous beetle have found their way into that collection since 1976. From the analogy of various other insects with austral distributions that have achieved dramatic northward dispersal in recent decades, one might have suspected that *H. apiatus* would likewise be responding to an apparent “global warming” episode. Just the opposite may have taken place, with the range currently in a state of fragmentation.

In Florida *H. apiatus* is considered a pest on cultivated avocados (Woodruff, 1963). Elsewhere it has been found on sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*) (Blatchley & Leng, 1916), a species in the same family (Lauraceae) that is widespread over most of eastern North America. The distinctly lowland distribution of *H. apiatus* is thus possibly a reflection of some environmental constraints other than host availability, unless, as suggested to me by Warren E. Steiner, the

preferred host might actually be redbay (*Persea borbonia)*, a species of Lauraceae with a distribution encompassed by that of *H. apiatus*. One of Mr. Vigneault's specimens came to an ultraviolet light, the others were taken by beating undetermined woody plants, which could have included sassafras or redbay, both common at Virginia Beach. Dr. Buhlmann's specimen was taken in a pitfall trap during the period of 3 August-8 September 1989, establishing a summer-long activity period. That the species occurs as far inland as Raleigh implies a Virginia distribution more extensive than our single locality might suggest. Perhaps collecting efforts focused on the two tree species mentioned above may yield additional information on this interesting beetle.

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