

**THE GENUS *TRACHYSCELIS* (COLEOPTERA: TENEBRIONIDAE) IN  
NORTH AMERICA: SYNONYMY, ORIGIN,  
DISTRIBUTION, AND DECLINE**

WARREN E. STEINER, JR.

Department of Systematic Biology - Entomology, NHB-187  
Smithsonian Institution  
Washington, DC 20560, U.S.A.

**Abstract**

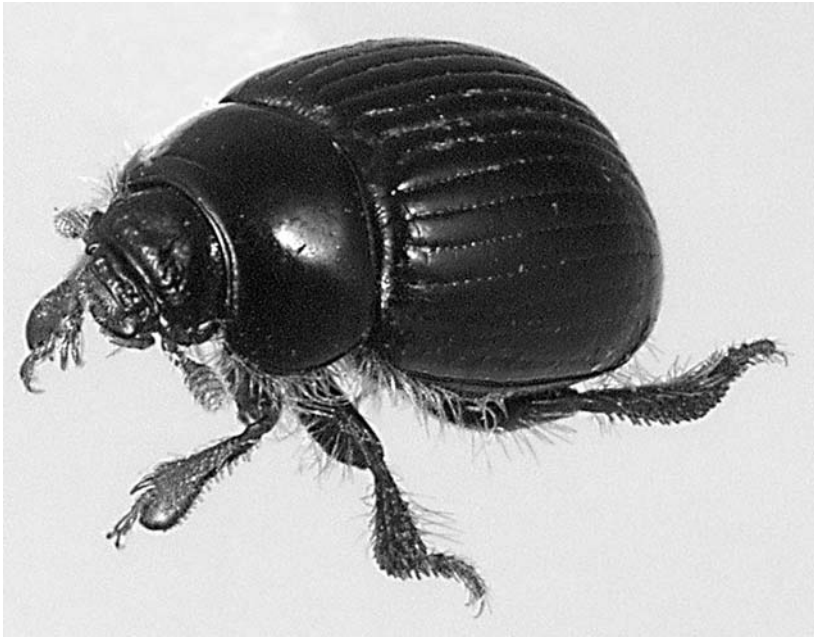
*Trachyscelis flavipes* Melsheimer (Coleoptera: Tenebrionidae), described from North America in 1846, has been found to be an introduced species, probably from Europe. It is synonymized under *T. aphodioides* Latreille (**new synonymy**) described from France in 1809. Using literature and museum collection data, the distributional history of the beetle is reviewed and a new record for South America (Brazil) is reported.

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The genus *Trachyscelis* Latreille has long seemed to have an uncomfortable fit among the tenebrionid taxa of the Americas, with *T. flavipes* Melsheimer (1846), described from "Virginia," being the only New World member of its tribe (of three genera) and in a genus of 10 known species (Gebien 1938; Aalbu *et al.* 2002). The tribe Trachyscelini is placed in the Diaperinae "near Phaleriini and Crypticini" (Doyen *et al.* 1989). My interest in this odd little scarab-like darkling beetle was peaked simply because, in spite of many years of focused fieldwork, I have never found it in the continental United States, while some historic collections proved that it could be found in large numbers. In recent years other collectors and I have found the species easily and in abundance on several Caribbean islands, but searching the same microhabitats in the U.S. at known historic localities and throughout the seasons has yielded no *Trachyscelis* specimens. North American specimens are not common in collections and most records are dated prior to 1900. The apparent disappearance of this insect from the continental fauna has been peculiar.

Furthermore, in studying and sorting the specimens of *Trachyscelis* during routine collection work at the Smithsonian Institution, it became apparent that the American *T. flavipes* were not distinct from specimens of *T. aphodioides* Latreille from southern Europe. There is some variation in size, coloration and external details, even among individuals in series from single localities. The form of the male genitalia in New World specimens (from many localities) is identical among individuals from France, Spain, Sardinia, Tunisia, and other localities. With this scrutiny of new and old material and the review of past identifications presented below, I believe that all New World *Trachyscelis* are *T. aphodioides*. *Trachyscelis flavipes* Melsheimer, 1846 is hereby considered a junior synonym of *T. aphodioides* Latreille, 1809 (**NEW SYNONYMY**).

Melsheimer's type specimen is apparently lost, and is not among his material at the Museum of Comparative Zoology, but specimens in the collections of LeConte and Horn confirm the identity of this distinctive beetle (Fig. 1). A dorsal view is illustrated in the study by Marcuzzi and D'Aguiar (1971). It is easy to see why *Trachyscelis* specimens are often misplaced among collections of aphodiine scarabs. The distributional and nomenclatorial history of the beetle is reviewed below, with a discussion of the probable adventive origin.



**Fig. 1.** *Trachyscelis aphodioides*, oblique frontal view. Body length, 3.5 mm. Specimen labeled "Ft. Monroe, Va."

### Review of Literature

In his description of *T. flavipes*, Melsheimer offered no mention or comparison of the American specimens with the type-species, *T. aphodioides*. He may not have had other specimens at hand and simply assumed that, occurring on opposite shores of the Atlantic, they were different. This was perpetuated by LeConte (1862), LeConte and Horn (1883) and Horn (1870) who also may not have been able to compare them. Equally interesting is the first report of *T. aphodioides* in the Antilles by Fleutiaux and Sallé (1889) with no discussion about its occurrence there as unusual. They are to be credited with correctly identifying the species; the North American reports for the genus may not have been a concern or known to them. But in the same paper they also listed "*nigra* (Chv.)" as a synonym under *T. aphodioides*. This must have referred to *T. nigra* Carter, not Chevrolat (see Gebien 1938), from New South Wales, Australia. This shows that they had a cosmopolitan concept of the species, but the Australian taxon is distinct (I have examined specimens identified as "niger" by H. J. Carter and A. M. Lea that do closely resemble *T. aphodioides*, yet differ in the shape of the tegmen and in other details; neither Gebien (1938) nor Doyen *et al.* (1989) recognized this synonymy).

So, Fleutiaux and Sallé (1889) recognized that this insect had a wide distribution, but subsequent identifications and records of *Trachyscelis* from the West Indies did not follow their hint, and added further confusion. The first report of Wolcott (1923) of "*Trachyscelis* (?) *flavipes* Melsheimer—Det. K. G. Blair" from Puerto Rico was followed in his (Wolcott 1936) listing for the island with additional material as "*Trachyscelis* sp. nov.—Det. E. A. Chapin." Then in a more annotated treatment (Wolcott 1950), he listed "*Trachyscelis flavipes* Melsheimer, as tentatively identified

by Mr. K. G. Blair . . . Other individuals . . . were considered a new species by Dr. E. A. Chapin." It is odd that Blackwelder (1945) catalogued only "*Trachyscelis* sp." from Puerto Rico, citing Wolcott (1936), and left out other New World records for the genus, e.g., Leng and Mutchler's (1914) listing (probably from Fleutiaux and Sallé) of *T. aphodioides* from Guadeloupe.

Then came Marcuzzi (1962) listing specimens from Barbuda as "*Trachyscelis* sp. . . . Very similar to *T. aphodioides*, but scutellum completely smooth, without any trace of scutellar stria. These cannot be *T. flavipes* Melsh., on account of the colour of the legs . . ." and then suggests they may be "of the species found in Puerto Rico," citing Wolcott (1936). In a table of the same paper he also listed the record of Fleutiaux and Sallé (1889) for *T. aphodioides* from Guadeloupe. In a later paper Marcuzzi and D'Aguilar (1971) used *T. flavipes* for this record and others, then Marcuzzi (1977) listed a "*Trachyscelis* sp." from Barbuda in addition to *T. flavipes*; later, he listed all records under *T. flavipes* (Marcuzzi 1984, 1998). So did Chalumeau (1982) but he did point out the question of distinctness between the two taxa. All other Western Hemisphere occurrences or diagnoses in lists and catalogs have used Melsheimer's name *flavipes* to date.

### Distribution Records and Material Examined

North American specimen data are summarized in Table 1. Detailed data are wanting on the majority of specimens taken prior to 1900. Melsheimer's description was published in 1846, but the earliest year recorded on a specimen label is [18]82, then 1889 and 1890, all records from the vicinity of Norfolk, Virginia, close to each other at the mouth of the James River. The most recent records are the single specimens taken in Maryland in the 1950s, on the western shore of the Chesapeake Bay, with no records of the beetle on the continent in the interim. Exact locality data and dates of collection prior to the 1882 record are not available; LeConte (1862) gave only "sea-shore of the Southern States;" Horn (1870) and LeConte and Horn (1883) gave "Atlantic coast" and Aalbu *et al.* (2002) reported "Gulf States."

**Virginia Records.** The large series of card-mounted specimens from Ft. Monroe (some labeled only "Va." but others with the date "Aug 16/82") in the USNM are uniformly prepared, as if collected at the same time, and can be attributed most likely to the efforts of Hubbard and Schwarz. Most of those entomologists identified on the labels of other "Ft. Monroe" specimens were active during this same period (Mallis 1971) and, apparently, some specimens from this occurrence were traded among collectors of that time. Melsheimer's (1846) "Virginia" locality is unknown as is the quantity of specimens he had at hand when describing *T. flavipes*.

**Louisiana Records.** In addition to the single specimen labeled "La." in the LeConte Collection, Summers (1875) listed "*Trachyscelis flavipes* Mels." from the "region of Lake Pontchartrain." His material was likely collected not long before the publication date.

**Florida Records.** Key Biscayne was a site of much collecting by many of the same entomologists of the period discussed above; unfortunately, the year of collection is not included on specimen labels. The 3 specimens were likely taken after 1878 because the list of Florida Tenebrionidae of Schwarz (1878) did not include *T. flavipes*. Peck and Thomas (1998) listed *T. flavipes* from Dade County, based on the specimens cited here, but no other occurrences in the state are known. A survey of the Tenebrionidae of the Dry Tortugas in 1989 (unpubl. data) did not detect it.

**Maryland Records.** Historical records in the collections of Horn and Ulke (exact localities and dates unknown) and the more recent single occurrences from the 1950s are separated by more than 6 decades. The two recent records are 9 years apart but were taken at the same beach locality. The same area and others nearby have been visited by

Table 1. *Trachyscelis aphodioides*, North American specimens examined.

State	Label data	Specimens/ colln./	In colln./	Notes
FL	Biscayne Fla. Schwarz	1	OSUC	
FL	Biscayne Fla / Liebeck Collection	2	MCZC	
LA	La.	1	MCZC	LeConte Collection
MD	Md. / [red square] / Horn Coll H 7505	1	MCZC	Horn Collection; with det. Label by hand, "Trachyscelis flavipes Mels."
MD	Md. / [green square]	1	MCZC	Horn Collection
MD	Md.	1	USNM	Horn Collection; "Md." label underlined in blue
MD	Md.	4	CMNH	Ulke Collection
MD	Flag Pond, 3 mi S Kenwood Beach 24 Jun '59 Md O L Cartwright / Beach Drift	1	USNM	Det. label: "Trachyscelis flavipes Mels. Det. J. Doyen 1991"
MD	Kenwood Beh. IX-17-1950 Md. / L. J. Bottimer Collector	1	CNC	Det. label: "Trachyscelis flavipes Mels. Det. C.A. Triplehorn 1977"
VA	Ft. Monroe 30.5 Va.	75	USNM	date missing or crossed out in some labels; stacked card mount, on 4 pins
VA	(no label but assoc. with other series of 75)	129	USNM	stacked card mount as above, on 9 pins
VA	Ft. Monroe / 30.5 Va. / Coll Hubbard & Schwarz	2	USNM	
VA	Ft. Monroe / 16.7 Va. / Coll Hubbard & Schwarz	2	USNM	
VA	Trachyscelis flavipes Ft. Monroe, Va.	7	USNM	On 2 cards, 2 pins
VA	Trachyscelis flavipes Ft. Monroe, Va. Aug 16/82	18	USNM	1882 probable date; on 6 cards on 1 pin
VA	Ft. Monroe / Coll M L Linell	1	USNM	
VA	Ft. Monroe Va.	19	OSUC	
VA	Ft. Monroe Va.	3	CMNH	
VA	Ft. Monroe Va.	2	USNM	
VA	Ft. Monroe Va. / Wickham Colln.	2	USNM	
VA	Ft. Monroe Va. / Liebeck Collection	3	MCZC	
VA	Ft. Monr. Va. Schwarz	1	MCZC	
VA	Newport News, Va. 4/9/90. Schwarz	1	OSUC	1890 probable date
VA	Newport News, Va. 4/20/90, Schwarz	1	OSUC	1890 probable date
VA	Newport News, Va. 6/2/89, 7505	1	MCZC	Horn Collection; with det. Label, no author
VA	Newport News, Va. 6-2-89 - 7505 / F.C. Bowditch Coll.	9	MCZC	2 June 1889 probable date

Table 1. Continued.

State	Label data	Specimens/ colln./	In colln./	Notes
VA	Norfolk Va. / Chittn Coll	3	USNM	(Chittenden Collection; label on 1 specimen of 3)
VA	Va. 6306	3	USNM	On 1 of 3; 2 associated have no locality label but "Collection J.B.Smith",
VA	Va.	20	USNM	On 5 cards on 1 pin
VA	Va. / Casey bequest 1925	3	USNM	Casey's det. label "flavipes", on 1st in series
VA	Va. / Casey bequest 1925	2	USNM	with 2 dots under "Va.," label; = "Fr. Monroe," in Casey notebook
VA	Tracyscelis flavipes Mels. Va. July / [orange dot]	1	MCZC	LeConte Collection
?	[no label]	1	MCZC	LeConte Collection
		total specimens:	322	

me and others on numerous occasions since about 1970, with a focus on sampling the psammophilous Tenebrionidae of the Chesapeake region, but no *Trachyscelis* have been found.

**North Carolina Records.** Peck and Thomas (1998) listed *T. flavipes* from “NC” but I have not seen specimens from this state and the source of this record is unknown. Brimley (1938) did not list it.

**Antillean Distribution.** The beetle has been reported from several islands of the northern section of the Lesser Antilles (Marcuzzi 1984 and recent collection records), the Virgin Islands (Ivie 1996 and recent collection records) and Puerto Rico (as cited above). I have recently found it to be common on the Turks and Caicos Islands. It has not been detected in the Bahamas, Hispaniola, Jamaica, Cuba, or the Cayman Islands. Where it does occur, *T. aphodioides* can be very abundant—I have seen dozens of the beetles in a single handful of beach sand. Beetles live in pure fine sand at or just above the high tide line, usually under washed-up mats of marine algae and other plant debris and concentrated at the moist-dry interface of sand. It often shares the same microhabitat with *Phaleria* spp. and is common on small islands off shore from larger ones.

**Brazil Records.** In the USNM collection are 3 specimens of *T. aphodioides* (determined as “*Trachyscelis* sp.” by T. J. Spilman, 1970) labeled “Rio Doce. Olinda Pe.” and dated March and April 1970. The locality is on the coast of Pernambuco, Brazil. Two of the specimens are teneral, indicating an established breeding population. I suspect that other specimens from Brazil are in collections but I am not aware of any report of the occurrence of the genus in South America prior to this.

### Discussion and Conclusions

This beetle may be added to the list of European species introduced to the Americas. Rather than a natural occurrence here, I strongly suspect that *T. aphodioides* arrived early in the colonial period via the ballast of ships, as has been postulated for other soil insects (Brown 1940, 1950; Lindroth 1957, 1968). The local abundance of the beetle on beaches likely facilitated this. It is easy to imagine large numbers of the beetles being scooped up in surface sand to fill the hold of a ship under sail from European ports, then dumped on arrival in the West Indies or North American sites with similar suitable habitats. “The ballast was always from the beaches, and sand was liked best” as recorded by Lindroth (1957), describing the practice in one English port, and this was likely similar in Mediterranean localities where *T. aphodioides* occurs.

The beetle also has several characteristics that support the notion that it is adventive in the Western Hemisphere; e.g., an “erratic or immature distributional pattern” (Brown 1950) in the Americas and a “major disjunction in geography . . . with no native relatives” (Whitehead and Wheeler 1990). The historic records of the beetle in the U.S. show a spotty distribution in time and geography, with evidence that populations have died out over time and that multiple introductions had occurred but did not remain established. Also notable is the absence of *Trachyscelis* from the thorough listings of beetles from coastal states (between those with confirmed records); e.g., Alabama (Löding 1945) and South Carolina (Kirk 1969, 1970). The more recent occurrences in Maryland remain enigmatic in that the method of introduction could not have been that postulated for the 1800s; perhaps hurricanes (moving from the Caribbean to the mid-Atlantic U.S. coast) could transport these beach insects on occasion.

This insect is from a Mediterranean climate. The evident decline of the beetle along the U.S. coast since its discovery here may be due to its sensitivity to freezing temperatures, but it has not been recently found in southern Florida, either, which has distinctly Antillean tenebrionid faunal elements; some of the same species co-occur

with *T. aphodioides* in the West Indies. So, it is difficult to explain its inability to colonize Florida beaches. It also has not yet been found on islands of the western Caribbean, nor in Central America, in spite of scrutiny of suitable habitats. While multiple introductions are likely to have happened, subsequent spread of the beetle among Caribbean islands, including some small ones, has probably been due to the fact that it has fully developed flight wings. However, it has not been able to spread throughout the region.

Also interesting to note is the reported disappearance of the species in France (Soldati 1995) including the region of the type-locality, while *T. aphodioides* has been taken at other Mediterranean localities during the past decade (e.g., Fattorini *et al.* 1999; Ferrer and Soldati 1999; Mifsud and Scupola 1998). It may be sensitive to pollutants or some other disturbance to habitats in its native range. A worldwide review of the tribe and biogeographical data would be most informative and further delineate the natural and anthropogenic occurrences of this and related species.

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## SCIENTIFIC NOTE

### Occurrence of the Introduced Weevil *Myosides seriehispidus* Roelofs in Great Smoky Mountains National Park (Coleoptera: Curculionidae)

O'Brien (2000) documented the occurrence of the Asian short-nosed weevil *Myosides seriehispidus* Roelofs (Entiminae, Cyphicerini) in the U.S. and provided updated genus and species descriptions and photographs. His records indicated a U.S. distribution at multiple localities within Connecticut, New York, Ohio, Rhode Island, and West Virginia. Single records were given for the District of Columbia, Maryland, New Jersey, North Carolina and Pennsylvania. The oldest record was based on a specimen collected in Connecticut during 1973. Anderson and Howden (2002) included the genus in their key to the Entiminae of the United States and Canada. Here we report the occurrence of the species in Great Smoky Mountains National Park (GSMNP) and add it to the park's long list of unwelcome non-native species. This record also represents a new state record for Tennessee.

**New Record.** Three specimens labeled: /TN: Blount Co. GRSM ATBI Plot, Cades Cove old field Malaise trap MT04/ 242863E 3942201N 23 Apr–12 May 2003 CRParker MT0420030512/. The three specimens bear Louisiana State Arthropod Museum (LSAM) database numbers 0027093, 0027094, 0027100. The first two are deposited in the LSAM, the third in the collection at Great Smoky Mountain National Park.

The new records are from one of 11 long-term study sites associated with the all taxa biodiversity inventory (ATBI) currently underway in GSMNP (White and Morse 2000). These sites are located across a broad range of habitats present in GSMNP. Malaise, pitfall, and Lindgren funnel traps were operated continuously for two years beginning spring 2001 to gather baseline insect diversity and distributional data within the park. The presence of an apterous, mainly litter-dwelling weevil in a malaise trap suggests that the source population originated near the trap and potentially could be located and studied. The life history of the species is poorly known and its potential status as a pest of native and/or cultivated plants, mode of dispersal, and other biological details are unknown.

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**Christopher Carlton, Louisiana State Arthropod Museum, Department of Entomology, LSU Agricultural Center, Baton Rouge, LA 70808, U.S.A., and Robert S. Anderson, Canadian Museum of Nature, P.O. Box 3443, Station D, Ottawa, ON K1P 6P4, CANADA.**

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