



# THE NORTHERN TABLELANDS DUNG BEETLE EXPRESS



**IF YOU'VE GOT IT, FLAUNT IT!**

**AUTUMN, 2004**

Have you noticed really spectacular beetle activity on your property? Why not share it around? There are many areas in Australia that do not have well established dung beetle populations. There are many more areas which have some species but would benefit from a more diverse dung beetle population.

While you might look at your beetles and think there's so many of them they can't be special you could be wrong. Some very useful species are yet to reach their full distribution potential.

Barriers to natural re-distribution include the geographical and the resource driven. Geographical barriers may be a particular area which requires considerable energy to cross. While dung beetles can fly long distances, energy conservation dictates that they fly to areas which are most easily accessible.

Resource driven barriers occur when a species has no pressure to re-distribute as its niche location provides all its requirements. Dispersal from these areas only occurs when the population grows to the point that resources become scarce. With slow breeding species this can take many years.

These factors limit the spread and establishment of Dung beetles but can be overcome by physically harvesting and re-establishing colonies in areas which are climatically and geographically similar to the area of origin.

While the Dung Beetle Express has been harvesting and re-distributing beetles for some time we are always interested in new harvest sites. If you have a beetle which appears in large numbers please contact the Project Officer for details on how you can benefit other Landholders. We are also seeking Site Monitors - a more permanent arrangement which gives a broad overview of beetle activity on your property.

Now before you rush off and start randomly moving beetles, there is a certain science to beetle redistributions. There are important considerations including the possibility of spreading disease and weed seeds, colony sizes and climate matching. PLEASE ASK US!



## Inside this issue:

If you've got it, flaunt it	1
The Fly Express	2
How Depressus	2
Mathematics and Dung Beetles?	3
Swamp	3
What have we been doing?	3
Leave em laughin'	4



Natural Heritage Trust  
*Helping Communities Help Australia*

## NOT THE NORTHERN TABLELANDS FLY EXPRESS BUT .....

Following our article on bush flies in the Summer Edition (if you missed it, get it now!) we received a number of enquiries. Strangely enough the questions were largely unrelated to dung beetles! Odd considering that this newsletter is dedicated to the promotion of dung beetles and their benefits. While seriously questioning the nature of our correspondent's lives we are here to help and we have managed to answer these fascinating fly questions.

- From Col (near Ashford) Where do flies go of a night? On cooler nights bush flies sleep on vegetation (more comfortable than the ground). On warm nights bright lights may wake them up and they'll come and join the party again. (I know people like that)
- From Kara (email) How do you tell the males from the females? Look at their eyes - the males eyes are so close they almost touch. The female's are further apart. (Kara - how bored are you?)
- From Jeff (aged 5) I like flies - can I teach them not to annoy us and to do tricks? No. Ants, fleas and cockroaches all have learning capacity. No experimenter has ever taught a fly anything (not even after 15 years of trying) Now who doesn't have a life!

Now, if everyone feels they've had enough of flies I might just return to the dung beetle issue for the rest of this newsletter!

For further information on flies look out for a publication by Jim Heath entitled "The fly in your eye". I, for one, am very grateful to Jim's book - how else was I supposed to answer all these stup.... Um interesting fly questions?

## HOW DEPRESSUS!

So you thought Australia's overseas Dung beetle introductions began in the 1960's? Actually *Onthophagus depressus*, a Southern African species, is believed to have been accidentally introduced into the Sydney area prior to 1900. The species was originally collected by Blackburn in 1904. It was then described as *Onthophagus carteri*, but further collections by Sloane, Matthews and Bornemissza led to confirmation that the specimens were *O. depressus*.

This species seems to have been a common accidental introduction as it was also discovered in the south-eastern United States in 1937 and Madagascar in 1953.

The beetle has an extensive range in Australia. It is found at Bateman's Bay, Trangie, Narrabri, The Barrington Tops and as far north as the Queensland border. It has also been collected on the Five Islands between Wollongong and Port Kembla.

The species is remarkably adaptable, tolerating fringe marine conditions, cold climates and areas of dry heat equally comfortably. Perhaps something we should be on the lookout for!

The description by Matthews puts it at about the same size as *Onthophagus gazella*. It is black but has dense stubble which allows soil to adhere to the cuticle giving it a paler appearance.

As the distribution information was published in 1972 this beetle could be anywhere!

We don't guarantee anything - but if you find something a bit like this, send it in and we'll try to confirm its identity.

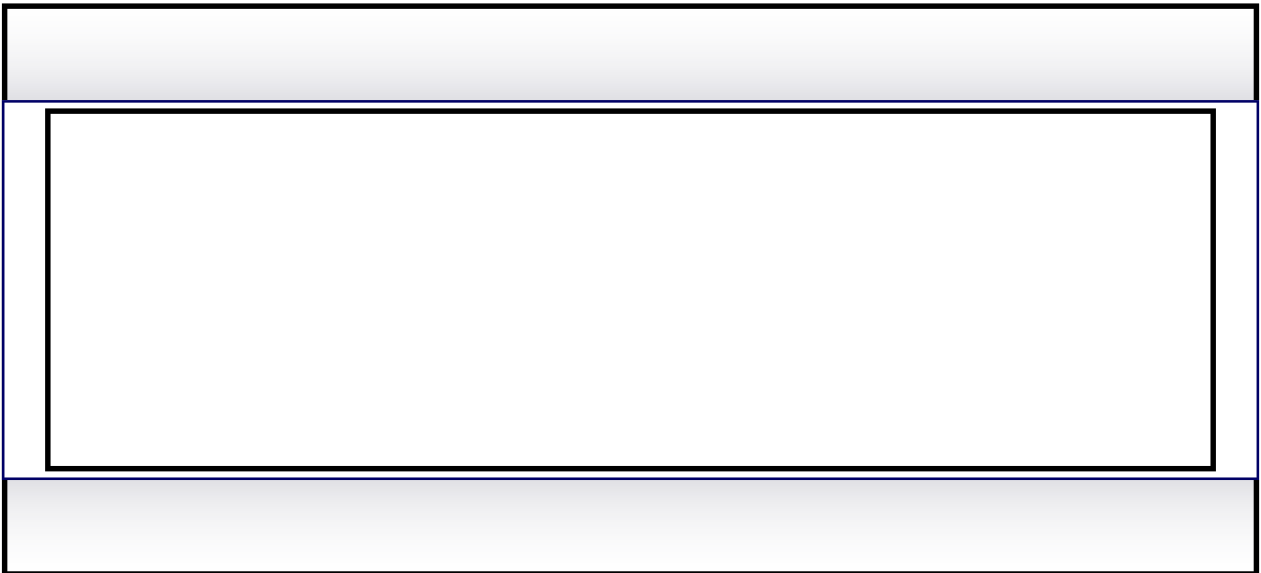
*This information came from "A Revision of the Scarabaeine Dung Beetles of Australia" 1. Tribe Onthophagini by E.G. Matthews. 25th February, 1972.*

## MATHEMATICS AND DUNG BEETLES?

This little gem came to us courtesy of Alan Marsh (original publication: "A Time of Gifts" by Patrick Leigh Fermour). The story refers to John Dee who was an English mathematician and wizard who once created quite an impression in Central Europe by raising spirits by incantation in various castles. His arrival in Europe followed his being stripped of his fellowship at Cambridge. The reason for this disgrace? The footnote to this story gives a rather bizarre explanation. Read on .....

- "The cause of his downfall was a public demonstration of the device by which Trygaeus, the hero of The Peace of Aristophanes, flew to the crest of Olympus to beg the Gods to end the Peloponnesian War. As this vehicle was a giant dung-beetle from Mount Etna which the protagonist refueled with his own droppings on the long ascent, the exhibition may well have caused a stir. I would like to have seen it."

Perhaps John should have stuck with mathematics? Still can't quite get the connection between mathematics and dung beetles? Physics perhaps? I never was real good at physics or mathematics or wizardry for that matter.....



## WHAT HAVE WE BEEN DOING?

Quite a lot really. Despite a poor start to the harvesting season we have managed to harvest 3 colonies. The species were *Onitis alexis*, *Onitis pecuarius* and *Onthophagus binodis*. These have been released at sites near Tenterfield, Ben Lomond and Wollomombi. Further harvests are planned.

We have also purchased colonies of *Euoniticellus fulvus*, *Onthophagus taurus* and *O. binodis*. John Feehan (Soilcam) has once again shown his support by generously giving us a free colony of *E. fulvus*. Some of the colonies were released on the Northern Tablelands but others were purchased on behalf of Landcare groups from other regions. We are happy to offer a brokering service if your group cannot afford to purchase enough colonies to make freighting them to you worthwhile for larger suppliers.

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#### OUT AND ABOUT WITH US

**6th March - Dangarsleigh  
Breakfast 8:00a.m.**

**12th March - "The Hill" - Kentucky  
9:00 a.m.**

**26th March - "Lana" Uralla  
9:00 a.m.**

**For further information on these  
days contact SNELC on 67729123**

**Your area's not here? Why not?  
Contact the Project Officer to book  
your day**

[www.dungbeetles.com.au](http://www.dungbeetles.com.au)

## LEAVE 'EM LAUGHIN'

Times in the Tamworth/Manilla Landcare Office must be slow! Or could it be that Brenda (Landcare Co-ordinator) senses a victory? We all know she has a competitive edge. Anyway in the spirit of fair play we have decided to try her idea and hold a wacky limerick competition. The limerick must, of course, contain a reference to dung beetles. Here is Brenda's offering.

**A gorgeous blue belly has spiniger,  
but don't drop him into the vinegar,  
He'll be bleached dirty white -**

**Oh what a sight!**

**New species? No, albino spiniger.**

Judging will close on the 10th May, 2004. The winner will be announced in the Winter issue.

The prize will be ...? Not sure really, a dried beetle or two? Publication of your Limerick in one of the best newsletters around (Yes - this one) and the chance (remote) that you will be discovered by a top publisher who just happens to read this newsletter. Wow - better get the thinking caps on.

Send your entries to the Project Officer at any of the contact points listed above.