

Meconema thalassinum (DeGeer, 1773) (Orthoptera: Tettigonioidae) found from Finland

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We present the first observation of a living Oak Bush Cricket *Meconema thalassinum* (DeGeer, 1773) in Finland: In the late evening of Aug 17, 2023 a single specimen was found in the light of an outdoor lamp attached to a building's wall in Marienhamn, Åland Islands. The natural environment of the discovery site corresponds well to the known European habitat preferences of this unobtrusive species.

Tässä artikkelissa esitetään ensimmäinen havainto elävänä löydetyistä tammihepokatista *Meconema thalassinum* (DeGeer, 1773) Suomesta. Yksilö löytyi myöhään illalla A: Maarianhamina 17. elokuuta 2023 hakeutuneena rakennuksen ulkolle. Löytöpaikan ympäristö vastaa hyvin tämän piilottelevan lajin luontaista elinympäristöä etelämpänä Euroopassa.

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Introduction

The Oak Bush Cricket, *Meconema thalassinum* (DeGeer, 1773), is a small (male 12–15 mm, female 11–16 mm; Strid 2010), light green coloured member of family Tettigonioidae. It is notorious for its secretive lifestyle and is generally thought to be more abundant than observations suggest (Zechner et al. 2005, Massa et al. 2012). The Oak Bush Cricket is a nocturnal and strictly arboreal species, often living high in the tree tops (Massa et al. 2012).

The species lives in deciduous trees, and males do not stridulate but communicate by drumming leaves with their hindlegs. The Oak Bush Cricket is able to fly (Strid 2010). Both sexes are long-winged as adults, and males have conspicuous long cerci (Karjalainen 2009, Sutton et al. 2023). Its habitats of choice include deciduous forests, forest edges, single standing trees and urban areas like gardens and allées (Strid 2010, Hochkirch et al. 2016).

The Oak Bush Cricket is a predatory species feeding mainly on aphids (Massa et al. 2012). Females lay eggs into bark crevices on lower tree stems during the night (Hochkirch et al. 2016). The species has one generation per year. Adults can be found from July to October (Walker 2023).

The Oak Bush Cricket is abundant in Southern and Central Europe, up to Caucasus Mountains in the east (Massa et al. 2012). In Britain its range has lately been expanding north and west (Sutton et al. 2017). In Estonia, there has been a known population in Mihkli oak forest at least since the 1960s (Remm 1970). In Latvia, the species was added to the 2022 checklist (Starka et al. 2022). In Sweden, it is recorded as far north as the Uppsala region (Liljebäck 2023).

A few dead individuals have earlier been recorded from Finland, the first one in December 1978 inside a bottle of rum from France (Albrecht 1979). More recently, the author found a dead male specimen in Gröna Udden camping area kitchen building August 11, 2021 (FinBIF 2023). Given the circumstances the specimen seemed to be an import.

Material and methods

When observed, the specimen was photographed immediately with a digital camera (Figure 1.). Then it was carefully collect-



Figure 1. *Meconema thalassinum* male specimen as it was when found. **Kuva 1.** Tammihepokatti -koiras löytöhetkellä.



Figure 2. Lush deciduous habitat by Östernäs road. View looking south. **Kuva 2.** Rehevää lehtimetsähabitaa Östernäsvägenillä. Näkyvä etelää kohti.

ed, stunned with ethyl acetate, and preserved as a dry specimen by the author. The individual will be deposited to the collection of Natural History Museum in Helsinki.

Results

Material. FINLAND: Åland: Mariehamn. 1 male. 60° 5.5' N 19° 57.0' E, 17.VIII.2023 (leg. S. Kotiranta)

Habitat. The specimen was found on a building wall by the outdoor light about two meters above ground at 22:38. Weather was clear, temperature about +15°C. The site is located by the Gröna Udden camping area and the Tullarns Äng protected deciduous forest (Figure 2). The deciduous forest continues from the protected area to the camping area without a visible border on tree level.

Discussion

The Oak Bush Cricket is a common species in Europe and has invaded new areas with the help of human transportation (Massa et al. 2012, Walker 2023) and possibly climate change (Sutton 2017). It is possible that the species has travelled to Mariehamn with tourists and formed a local population, although it is also possible that it has spread into the region on its own (Karjalainen, priv. comm.) as Strid (2010) consider it as the most skilful flyer of all Nordic bush crickets.

Based on the observations reported to Artportalen, the species may have appeared in the Stockholm area perhaps as early as in the 1990s. The number of observations reported there has been increasing since year 2021. If so, the dead specimen found in August 2021 might have been local too.

There is plenty of suitable habitat for this species from the camping area through the Tullarns Äng park all the way to Ma-

riehamn town hall park, Lilla Holmen, and the Eastern harbour. Since the species is tiny, strictly arboreal, nocturnal, and does not stridulate, it may be that the population have been living in the area without being noticed – perhaps even for years. If the species has spread by its own, it may also occur elsewhere on Åland. It is advised that visitors to Åland – and especially Mariehamn – keep their eyes open in the hope of subsequent observations, respecting the status of Tullarns Äng as a nature reserve, of course.

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