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272

Systematics, phylogeny and biogeography of genus *Balkanopetalum* Verhoeff, 1926 (Diplopoda: Callipodida: Schizopetalidae)

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Abstract

The genus *Balkanopetalum* Verhoeff, 1926, is revised. The following species are recognised: *B. armatum* Verhoeff, 1926 (the type species), *B. rhodopinum* Verhoeff, 1937, *B. beskovi* Strasser, 1973, *B. petrovi* sp.n., *B. bulgaricum* sp.n., and *B. graecum* sp.n. All species, except *B. graecum* (Greece) are Bulgarian endemics. A very preliminary phylogenetic analysis suggests the following monophyletic groupings within the genus: (all species except *B. rhodopinum*); (*beskovi* + *graecum* + *petrovi*); (*armatum* + *bulgaricum*). The genus is near-endemic to the Rhodopi region which is probably also its area of origin.

Key words: Diplopoda, Callipodida, *Balkanopetalum*, phylogeny, biogeography

INTRODUCTION

The genus *Balkanopetalum* was erected by Verhoeff (1926) to include a single new species, *B. armatum*, found in a cave near to the Cherepish Monastery, NW Bulgaria. Later, Verhoeff (1937) described another congeneric species, which he named *B. rhodopinum*, found in the Novata Peshtera Cave near Peshtera, the Western Rhodopi Mts. (Bulgaria). Strasser (1973) described the third member of the genus - *B. beskovi*, found in the Topchika Cave near Dobrostan, also in the Western Rhodopi Mts. Several authors (Verhoeff, 1937; Strasser, 1966, 1969, 1975; Beron, 1994) have contributed faunstic records expanding the generic range, so far, however, exclusively within Bulgaria.

During the last ten years, owing to the efforts of a group of biospeleologists from the National Museum of Natural History in Sofia (NMNH), many new samples containing callipodidans became available for a taxonomic study. Together with these new findings, older samples housed in the diplopod collection of the NMNH were examined, too.

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